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Bernard Malamud's Selected Fiction in the Context of Black-Jewish Literary Relations

Vybraná díla Bernarda Malamuda v kontextu černošsko-židovských literárních vztahů

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Souhlasím se zapůjčením diplomové práce ke studijním účelům.

I have no objections to the MA thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.

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Abstract

Although Bernard Malamud's fiction has been frequently regarded as allegorical and symbolic, Malamud did not avoid the period's social issues in his works, such as the racial question and the changing nature of relationship between American Jews and African Americans. The present thesis aims to discuss Malamud's selected fiction dealing with Black-Jewish relations, namely short stories "Angel Levine," (1955) "Black Is My Favorite Color" (1963) and the novel *The Tenants*, (1971) and to place them into the context of Black-Jewish relations in the United States and of Black-Jewish literary dialogues and the tensions they express. It thus seeks to evaluate Malamud's role in the discourse of Black-Jewish relations in America.

Calling upon a theoretical framework, outlined in chapter 2, based on philosophical and sociological findings of Judith Butler, John Searle, and Michael Omi with Howard Winant, the study examines the role of language and literature in constructing the Self and the Other (understood both as individual and collective identities, including categories of race and ethnicity), suggesting thus that literary texts, such as Malamud's selected fiction, are a part of discursive dialogue through and against which American Jews and Blacks construct their identities. Apart from the approaches to identity, the theoretical framework provides a historical and socio-political overview of the so-called "Black-Jewish alliance," following thus Omi and Winant's argument that both a social/historical structure and cultural representations must be considered at the same time when discussing race. The thesis also briefly assesses the role of literature, publishing, and press in the history of Black-Jewish relations and then analyses several intertextual dialogues between Jewish and African-American critics and writers. Touching upon issues such as minority-majority tension or cultural authority, the literary exchanges reveal that it is frequently the space of literature where American Blacks and Jews renegotiate their status in American society.

Chapters three, four and five employ the findings presented in the theoretical approach and they provide an analysis of Malamud's selected texts based on close-reading. The third chapter concentrates on the way Jewish Self and Black Other are performatively constructed in relation to each other. In the fourth chapter, the frequently accepted progression of Black-Jewish relations from brotherhood to mutual antagonism is questioned with regard to Malamud's texts. The thesis discusses ambivalence inherent in mutual contacts and Malamud's use of irony, which complicate such a simplistic view of the evolution of relationship between the two groups. The fifth chapter explores discursive tensions over certain words and concepts, which contributed to renegotiation of Black-Jewish relations in American context, such as the notion of the stranger, ghetto and the Holocaust, and the power relations implied in names and naming.

Key words: Black-Jewish relations, context, America, discourse, identity, performativity, language, literature

Abstrakt

Ačkoliv je tvorba Bernarda Malamuda často interpretována v alegorické a symbolické rovině, Malamud se ve svých dílech nevyhýbal společenským problémům doby, jako například rasové otázce a vztahu mezi Židy a černochy v Americe. Cílem této práce je rozebrat Malamudovy prózy, ve kterých se zabývá černošsko-židovskými vztahy – jmenovitě povídky Anděl Levine („Angel Levine," 1955), Černá je moje oblíbená barva („Black Is My Favorite Color," 1963) a román Nájemníci (*The Tenants,* 1971) – a umístit je do kontextu černošsko-židovských vztahů ve Spojených státech a do kontextu literárních dialogů mezi afroamerickými a židovskými kritiky a spisovateli. Záměrem této studie je tedy zhodnotit Malamudovu roli v diskursu černošsko-židovských vztahů v Americe.

Teoretický rámec, popsaný v druhé kapitole, vychází z filozofických a sociologických poznatků, jak je formulovali Judith Butler, John Searle a sociologové Michael Omi a Howard Winant. Práce zkoumá roli jazyka a literatury v konstruování sebe sama (the Self) a toho druhého, jiného (the Other), přičemž těmito kategoriemi se rozumí jak individuální, tak i kolektivní identita, a tedy i identita rasová a etnická. Literární díla, včetně vybraných Malamudových próz, jsou tudíž součástí diskursu, v rámci něhož a proti němuž američtí Židé a černoši konstruují své identity. Teoretická část se kromě přístupů k problému identity zabývá také historickým a společensko-politickým vývojem černoško-židovských vztahů, čímž navazuje na tvrzení Omiho a Winanta, kteří zdůrazňují, že během diskuzí o rasové identitě je třeba zohlednit jak rozměr uměleckého ztvárnění, tak i společensko-historického kontextu. Práce tudíž poskytuje také krátké zhodnocení role literatury, nakladatelství a periodik ve vývoji vzájemných vztahů a poté rozebírá vybrané černoško-židovské literární dialogy, ve kterých se autoři dotýkají témat jako napětí mezi minoritou a majoritou či kulturní autority. Tyto výměny potvrzují, že hledání sebe samého a svého místa ve společnosti se často odehrává na půdě literatury.

Samotné jádro diplomové práce se nachází ve třetí, čtvrté a páté kapitole, ve kterých jsou poznatky z teoretické části aplikovány na Malamudova vybraná díla pomocí metody blízkého čtení (close reading). Třetí kapitola se soustředí na způsob, jakým židovské a afroamerické postavy konstruují své identity ve vzájemném kontaktu. Kapitola čtvrtá problematizuje čtení zakládající se na předpokladu, že vybrané prózy odráží vývoj vzájemných vztahů od bratrství po antagonismus. Místo této interpretace práce zdůrazňuje rozporuplnost společných kontaktů a použití ironie, které takový pohled přinejmenším komplikují. Pátá kapitola zkoumá, jakým způsobem rozpory mezi významy jistých slov a pojmů (jako například pojem cizinec, ghetto a holokaust) a systém mocenských vztahů spjatý se jmény a pojmenováváním přispěly k ustavení vztahů mezi Afroameričany a americkými Židy.

Klíčová slova: černošsko-židovské vztahy, kontext, Amerika, diskurs, identita, performativita, jazyk, literatura

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Born in America as the son of Russian-Jewish immigrants, Bernard Malamud has often been referred to as one of the most prominent Jewish-American authors of the post-World War II decades, alongside authors such as Philip Roth and Saul Bellow. Similarly, to both Roth and Bellow, Malamud refused to accept such a label and he repeatedly protested against this categorization: "Bellow pokes fun at this sort of thing by calling 'Bellow-Malamud-Roth' the Hart, Schaffner and Marx of Jewish-American literature."[1] Rather than a Jewish author, Malamud considered himself to be an American one writing occasionally about Jewish characters and themes:

> I'm an American, I'm a Jew, and I write for all men. A novelist has to, or he's built himself a cage. I write about Jews, when I write about Jews, because they set my imagination going. […] Sometimes I make characters Jewish because I think I will understand them better as people, not because I am out to prove anything. […] I was born in America and respond, in American life, to more than Jewish experience. I wrote for those who read.[2]

But those who read have frequently found similarities and analogies between Malamud's fiction and the works by other Jewish-American writers,[3] proving thus that literature, as well as the identity of the author, is dependent on a context and on relations to others. Thus in *The Cambridge History of American Literature* (1999), Morris Dickstein places Malamud and his works in the context of historical, social and literary developments of the post-World War II America, juxtaposing him not only with Jewish but also African-American writers:

[1] Leslie and Joyce Field, "An Interview with Bernard Malamud," *Bernard Malamud: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1975) 12.
[2] Alan Cheuse and Nicholas Delhanco, eds. *Talking Horse: Bernard Malamud on Life and Work* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) 19-20.
[3] For an overview of distinguishing features of Jewish-American writing see Justin Quinn (ed.), Martin Procházka et al., *Lectures on American Literature* (Praha: Karolinum, 2011) 253.

> Malamud's work shows how much the fiction of the fifties was internalized into myth and psychological fable. But because of the unforgettable facts of persecution and discrimination, ethnic writing also maintained an important social base. It was impossible for a black[4] or Jewish writer to focus on the self without also writing about the social conditions that assaulted and helped define it. […] As long as social acceptance remained problematic, as long as people could be hated or excluded because of the color of their skin or the shape of their nose, an "American" identity could never fully substitute for ethnic and communal roots.[5]

Dickstein's statement implies that the Self[6], in the sense of both individual and collective identities, can be at least partially expressed in literature, together with the context that plays an important role in its definition. Consequently, literature can be regarded, as Ethan Goffman writes in *Imagining Each Other: Blacks and Jews in Contemporary American Literature* (2000), as "one forum for society's multiplicitous clash of ideologies, a dialogue by which identity is demarcated, defined, refined, and redefined."[7] Participants of this dialogue in post-World War II America are, to return to Dickstein's juxtaposition, frequently Jewish and African Americans, who have repeatedly employed the other group to renegotiate their own identity and status in American society. "For a significant number of African and Jewish American writers," Emily Miller Budick writes in her study *Blacks and Jews in Literary Conversation* (1998), "the other group becomes a vehicle by which to think through their own ethnic identities."[8]

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[4] A note on spelling: The spelling of the words black(s)/Black(s) and white(s)/White(s) are not consistent in critical literature. When referring to an ethnic group, the thesis uses the capitalised version; within quotations, the original spelling is preserved.

[5] Morris Dickstein, "Fiction and Society, 1940-1970," *The Cambridge History of American Literature,* ed. Sacvan Bercovitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 249.

[6] A note on spelling: In the context of discussing identity, especially in the relation with the Other, the thesis uses capitalized spelling of the word Self. Within quotations, the original spelling is preserved.

[7] Ethan Goffman, *Imagining Each Other: Blacks and Jews in Contemporary American Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000) 20.

[8] Emily Miller Budick, *Black and Jews in Literary Conversation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 1.

The aim of this thesis is to analyze how Black-Jewish relations function in the selected fiction of Bernard Malamud – short stories "Angel Levine" (1955), "Black Is My Favorite Color"[9] (1963) and the novel *The Tenants* (1971). Because the action of these works is filtered through Jewish consciousness, such a task presents certain challenges. While the performative construction of the Jewish Self can be relatively well traced, the understanding of the Black Other is necessarily more problematic. Malamud's fiction thus enacts the limits of interethnic dialogues (be they between Jewish, African, Chinese, Latino Americans or any other ethnic group), within which mutual understandings are usually accompanied by misunderstandings, cultural appropriations by misappropriations. Examining the way Jewish and Black characters construct their individual and collective (racial, ethnic) identities in the two short stories and the novel thus can also shed some light on interethnic relations in America and on the construction of American culture in general.

The method of this study is that of a close reading of the texts with the aid of theoretical framework, outlined in chapter 2. The theoretical approach will combine philosophical approaches to identity (Judith Butler's concept of performativity, John Searle's emphasis on social aspect of constructing identities) with sociological theory (Michael Omi and Howard Winant's theory of racial formation). Considering the importance of historical and socio-political context in constructing identities, the theoretical approach will also provide an overview of the coalition between Blacks and Jews that peaked during the mid-1960s and disintegrated in the late 60s and beginning of the 70s. As the space where the Self and the Other meet is frequently the space of literature, the last part of the theoretical chapter will sketch references to and interpretations of selected emblematic Black-Jewish literary exchanges. The web of direct and indirect comments, reactions and counter reactions will help

[9]A note on spelling: The spelling of the words favorite/favourite and color/colour is not consistent in the history of publication of the short story. In the thesis, the American spelling – favorite, color - will be given preference to the European, taking into consideration Bernard Malamud's role in American context.

to understand ambivalence and implications of certain words and concepts in Malamud's fiction, discussed later in the thesis.

Chapter 3 examines how the Jewish Self and the Black Other are constructed in the two short stories and the novel and how Malamud's treatment of mutuality contributes to such construction. The following chapter will consider how the selected fiction reflects historical and social reality. It intends to question the existence of a frequently accepted progression from a magical brotherhood and the Jewish patron-Black recipient model to mutual antagonism and African-American rebellion. It is also going to elaborate on the tension between the two writers in *The Tenants* and between their stances on universalism and particularism. Chapter 5 will follow the argument of constructed and unstable nature of concepts and terms suggested in the theoretical part of the thesis. It is going to contemplate how both Black and Jewish characters in Malamud's fiction renegotiate concepts (such as the stranger, the ghetto) or the significance of names and naming) for themselves and how such renegotiations contribute to the understanding of the Self and the Other, as well as of Black-Jewish relations in general. The concluding chapter will assess Malamud's role in the discourse of Black-Jewish relations.

Chapter 2 – Theoretical Approach

2.1 Language and Literature: Constructing the Self and the Other

Before outlining the role of language and literature in constructing individual (the Self and the Other) and collective (race and ethnicity) identities, it is necessary to mention that the primary aim of this thesis is literary. The theoretical findings, derived from Judith Butler's concept of performativity as described in *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993), from John Searle's survey in *The Construction of Social Reality* (1995), and Michael Omi and Howard Winant's process of racial formation in their 3rd edition of *Racial Formation in the United States* (2015), are thus treated as a selective and highly simplified basis for literary analysis, not as a thorough account of the theories themselves. In other words, the thesis intends not to examine innovative approaches to questions of identity and race/ethnicity but rather to lay the basis for literary analysis of Bernard Malamud's selected works.

2.1.1 Performative Construction of Identities

At the outset of the theoretical approach stands the assumption that identities are constructed, opposing the essentialist view which assumes that there exist pre-given, fixed attributes which constitute a basis of Selves. Butler, Searle, and Omi with Winant deny such attitude and they advocate the idea of socially constructed nature of identities and concepts. Starting with Butler, the emphasis on effect instead on essence stands at the very core of her concept of performativity.[1] As she writes in *Gender Trouble* in connection with constructing a gender identity, "[t]he view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take

[1] Before proceeding further in investigating Butler's concept of performativity, it is important to mention that Butler developed her theory primarily in respect to gender and sex. However, she does not limit her approach strictly to those categories and she repeatedly admits that other factors can play a part in an identity construction, including, for example, race. Significantly, Butler refuses to treat these "vectors of power" as parallel or analogical and she stresses their mutual correlation, advocating that they "require and deploy each other for the purpose of their own articulation." Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York; London: Routledge, 1993) 18.

to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body,"[2] and later in the study, "identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results."[3] The word 'expressions' underlines the significance of language in such process of constructing through what appears to be mere effects or results of the construction.

Performativity, then, is the "reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains,"[4] the "power of discourse to produce effects through reiteration,"[5] or the power to "produce that which it names, to enact its own referent, to name and to do, to name and to make."[6] Language, in this view, is thus not a mere tool for communication or an ability to express oneself that is acquired in one's life; it is a means through which identity, materiality and meanings are constituted, invented and ascribed. Consequently, "reiterative power of discourse" can be questioned. If the concept of performativity denies the essentialist approach to identity and substitutes it by the idea of production of effects through reiteration, then it is inevitable to consider what it is that is reiterated.

Borrowing from Foucault, Butler calls this "regulatory ideal," which she describes as "an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time."[7] Bodies, identities and concepts are thus produced by (and they simultaneously produce) specific norms, which must be constantly repeated and cited to produce an effect of a stable identity or materiality. Performativity is therefore "not a singular 'act,' for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals

[2] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) xv.
[3] Butler, *Gender Trouble* 34.
[4] Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 2.
[5] Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 20.
[6] Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 107.
[7] Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 1.

or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition."[8] To utter or to name is, in other words, not enough to produce or enact that which it names, as that would suggest an unlimited power of the pronouncing subject. Rather, identity is formed by citation of accepted and preferred norm. "No 'act' apart from a regularized and sanctioned practice," Butler writes, "can wield the power to produce that which it declares."[9] The norm is in turn produced and constructed by the very act of citation; it does not exist prior to the citing and reiterating; it is formed, reaffirmed and reinvented in the course of the reiteration, similarly as identity does not have any preexisting essence but is being performatively constructed.

The normative power of performativity does not work only through reiteration but also through exclusion. According to Butler, the imperative of regulatory ideal "requires and institutes a 'constitutive outside' – the unspeakable, the unviable, the nonnarrativizable"[10] that she calls "abject beings" or "abject bodies". Abject beings are those bodies and identities that were cast off as deviant in the process of identification with the regulatory ideal. They designate the zones of social life which are not seen as belonging to an accepted norm but which are nevertheless needed for the norm to exist. "This zone of uninhabilability will constitute the defining limit of the subject's domain; it will constitute that site of identification against which – and by virtue of which – the domain of the subject will circumscribe its own claim to autonomy of life."[11] For example, identification with normative ideal of heterosexuality takes place through a repudiation of homosexuality; identification with Whiteness requires the disavowal of the category of Blackness; the call for acknowledging a minority requires the very binary system of majority-minority that it seeks to dismiss. In this way, both the Self and the Other are dependent on discursive practice, both are performatively constructed.

[8] Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 12.
[9] Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 107.
[10] Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 188.
[11] Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 3.

Consequently, identities can never stand apart from discourse and even the act of resistance is in fact confirmation of the norm, as the question of agency reveals: "The paradox of subjectivation […] is precisely that the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms. Although this constitutive constraint does not foreclose the possibility of agency, it does locate agency as a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power."[12] As a result, both identification with and opposition to reiterative practices of normative regimes always happen in the very same discourse, reasserting thus simultaneously its existence and renegotiating its boundaries.

Identity, hence, cannot be conceptualized outside language and it is language that makes the Self comprehensible to Others and Others to the Self, as Butler's comment on the use of ich-form clarifies:

> For this "I" that you read is in part a consequence of the grammar that governs the availability of persons in language. I am not outside the language that structures me, but neither am I determined by the language that makes this "I" possible. This is the bind of self-expression, as I understand it. What it means is that you never receive me apart from the grammar that establishes my availability to you.[13]

Both individual and collective identities can be therefore said to be dependent on language, which does not, nevertheless, reduce them just to verbal expressions. Butler's statement stresses the necessity of language for recognizing others and for being recognized by others. This moment of recognition implies that identification with as well as resistance to normative ideal must be, to a certain extent, performed in a socially understandable way, which draws attention to John Searle and Michael Omi with Howard Winant, who emphasize in their theories the social aspect of construction.

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[12] Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 15.
[13] Butler, *Gender Trouble* xxvi.

2.1.2 Social Aspect of Constructing Identities

At the beginning of his *Construction of Social Reality*, John Searle distinguishes between brute facts and institutional facts. Brute facts, in Searle's view, "require no human institution for their existence," unless they are stated, in which case the institution of language is required. Institutional facts, on the contrary, are dependent on human agreement and require human institutions.[14] It is precisely the possibility of existence, creation and the collective intentionality inherent in institutional facts that interests Searle and that opens the way for investigating the relationship between language and the process of social construction.

A crucial element in the creation of institutional facts is, in Searle's view, "the collective imposition of function, where the function can be performed only in virtue of collective agreement or acceptance."[15] Functions are earlier in the study described as always observer relative, never intrinsic, attributes which people assign to objects and phenomena.[16] "The key element in the move from the collective imposition of function to the creation of institutional facts," Searle continues, "is the imposition of a collectively recognized *status* to which a function is attached" and he labels these "status-functions."[17] The assignment of status-function is not a one-time gesture; it has to be a continued collective recognition and agreement of the validity of such a function, which parallels with Butler's emphasis on reiteration. Significantly, as functions are "never intrinsic to the physics of any phenomenon but are assigned from outside"[18] and status-functions are assigned by collective acknowledgment and persistent acceptance, the status can consequently be said not to exist

[14] Searle illustrates the difference between brute and institutional facts on several examples. While facts as that "Mount Everest has snow and ice near summit or that hydrogen atoms have one electron" exist independently of human opinions (unless they are expressed in language), institutional facts are dependent on human mind, as an example of money illustrates: "In order that this piece of paper should be a five dollar bill […] there has to be the human institution of money."
John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1995) 2.
[15] Searle, 39.
[16] Searle, 13-14.
[17] Searle, 41.
[18] Searle, 14.

without markers, "because, empirically speaking, there isn't anything else."[19] Those markers (language) are now "partly constitutive of the status."[20] In other words, institutional facts must be somehow represented, because they have no existence apart from their representation. Language is thus not only constitutive of the institutional facts but it gives them substance and ascribes meaning by collective agreement.

John Searle's account reveals the link between the language and identities and the way they are socially constructed. The Self is always in the tension between itself and socially imposed meanings, which are continuously assigned through language. It then becomes apparent that language has immense power in social construction of both individual and collective identities. The emphasis on the collective, social aspect of the construction also exposes the power relations innate in the process. As Searle points out: "One lesson to be derived from the study of institutional facts is this: everything we value in civilization requires the creation and maintenance of institutional power relations through collectively imposed status-functions. […] Institutional power – massive, pervasive, and typically invisible – permeates every nook and cranny of our social lives."[21]

Sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant share Searle's emphasis on social construction through power relations. In their theory of racial formation, they propose several steps that characterize "the process of race making, and its reverberations through the social order,"[22] the first two being especially useful for present discussion. At the beginning, they provide a concept of "racialization," which emphasizes how "the phonemic, the corporeal dimension of human bodies, acquires meaning in social life," returning the focus to the denial of essentialism. Racial meanings are, in their view, not pre-given to an identity; they are ascribed by social practices governed by power relations:

[19] Searle, 69.
[20] Searle, 72.
[21] Searle, 94.
[22] Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015) Kindle file.

> Not because of any biologically based or essential difference among human beings across such phenomic variables as "color" or "hair texture," but because such sociohistorical practices as conquest and enslavement classified human bodies for purposes of domination – and because these same distinctions therefore became important for resistance to domination as well – racial phenotypes such as black and white have been constructed and encoded through the language of race. We define this process as *racialization* – the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group.[23]

Next, they advance the concept of "racial projects" to assess how formation of race occurs through a correlation between structure and representation. As defined by Omi and Winant, a racial project is "simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial identities and meanings, and an effort to organize and distribute resources (economic, political, cultural) along particular racial lines." It thus resembles, in a way, Butler's concept of performativity for its idea of concurrent reciprocity: similarly as a normative ideal discursively produces identities and is simultaneously produced by the very same process, racial projects consider the discursive means in which race is identified, affirmed and routinized by "institutional and organizational forms" as well as the way signification and interpretation of race shapes "the institutions and organizations through which we are embedded in the social structure."[24]

Omi and Winant's concepts of racialization and racial projects accentuate two dimensions at the intersection of which race, and ethnicity by analogy as well, is constructed: social structure and cultural representation: "Race is both a social/historical structure and a set of accumulated signifiers that suffuse individual and collective identities, inform social practices, shape institutions and communities, demarcate social boundaries, and organize the

[23] Omi and Winant
[24] Omi and Winant

distribution of resources."[25] As a consequence, it is not possible to represent racial (and ethnic) identities without locating them in a socio-historical context and vice versa. A literary analysis of Black-Jewish relations is therefore not possible without considering both a complex web of social, historical and political relations of the time when individual works were published,[26] and importance of such literary representations for the social understanding and constructing of the category of race.

2.1.3 Role of Literary Representations

The above discussed findings of Butler, Searle and Omi with Winant then draw attention not only to the role of language in construction of individual and collective identities, but to essential part of cultural representations of those identities, such as in literary portrayals. If concepts and identities are socially constructed and their essence is not innate but fluid, determined partially by contexts, then literature fixes both the identity and its context as existent at that time, enabling thus analysis of both dimensions. Such an analysis is of course going to be a reflection of a temporal state. Nevertheless, the realization of temporality of concepts and identities and their socially constructed nature opens the way for the possible reworking of the Self, which then reveals that literature can function not as a mere representation of identities and concepts but as an important part in the process of their redefinition and renegotiation of their meaning.

Returning to Butler's performativity, the reiteration of norms which discursively construct the Self is not an automatic repetition, it is a constant possibility for subverting, reinventing these norms. "As an ongoing discursive practice," Butler writes, the category of a woman, as well as the broader category of the Self, "is open to intervention and

[25] Omi and Winant
[26] The thesis will present a socio-historical overview of Black-Jewish relations in chapter 2.2 and apply its findings to Malamud's selected fiction in analytical chapters, particularly in chapter 4.

resignification."[27] The Self is not a passive product of norms, it is temporarily enabled and constituted by the norms, which implies that it possesses the power, albeit limited, to rework, renegotiate such norms, although it always affirms them in the process, as it is never possible to stand outside the discourse. Acknowledging the limits does not mean, however, abolishing the subversive possibility, which is, in Butler's view, an integral part of performativity. As already mentioned, performativity is not a singular act but a temporal process "which operates through the reiteration of norms" and identity "is both produced and destabilized in the course of this reiteration." Performativity thus always operates with instability of concepts and identities, which "is the *de*constituting possibility in the very process of repetition." Such a possibility therefore cannot abolish the norms entirely but can lead them into "a potentially productive crisis."[28]

It is in the space of literature where this potentially productive crisis, the attempted redefinition of constructs frequently takes place. If, in Butler's words, identity is considered "no longer as a preestablished position or a uniform entity; rather, as part of a dynamic map of power in which identities are constituted and/or erased, deployed and/or paralyzed,"[29] then literary texts themselves can be seen as having a crucial role in this process. Because they fix a temporal state of an identity and its context, they enter into a dialogue with other temporarily stable Selves and their social, political and historical frameworks.[30] They thus not only reflect and comment on tensions over identities and constructs but they at the same time reiterate, reinvent and subvert them, by which they confirm their existence and significance both within and outside literary representations. As Butler writes, "production of texts can be one way of reconfiguring what will count as the world." Texts, Butler elaborates, never exist on their own; they "enter a field of reading as partial provocations, not only requiring

[27] Butler, *Gender Trouble* 45.
[28] Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 10.
[29] Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 117.
[30] The thesis is going to expand on the suggested intertextuality and its function in the chapter 2.3.

a set of prior texts in order to fain legibility, but – at best – initiating a set of appropriations and criticisms that call into question their fundamental premises."[31]

Bernard Malamud's works thus can be seen as one of many constitutive parts of Black-Jewish relations in the United States, capturing and temporarily fixing both individual and collective identities, facilitating then their reiteration and possible subversion. The existence of extensive scholarship on Malamud and on the Black-Jewish relations demonstrate that Malamud's selected texts themselves have become a part of a discursive dialogue through and against which American Jews and African Americans define and redefine their Selves and their status in American society.

2.2 Historical and Socio-Political Context

To provide an overview of the so-called Black-Jewish "coalition" or "alliance" that peaked during the Civil Rights Movement and disintegrated in the late 1960s and beginning of the 1970s is a task requiring great simplification and selectiveness.[32] Similarly to the theoretical approach to identities sketched in the previous subchapter, the thesis does not intend to present an in-depth analysis but rather to extend the context needed for better understanding of Malamud's selected fiction, following thus Omi and Winant's argument that

[31] Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 19.

[32] Consequently, the number of sources used in this account is highly selective as well, including, for example, Murray Friedman's *What Went Wrong: The Creation and Collapse of Black-Jewish Alliance* (1995), Jonathan Kaufman's *Broken Alliance: The Turbulent Times Between Blacks and Jews in American* (1995) or Eric J. Sundquist's *Strangers in the Land: Black, Jews, Post-Holocaust America* (2005). Besides mentioned studies, the thesis also drew inspiration, especially with respect to secondary sources, from Michael Nason's MA thesis *The Ties That Bind: The Mutual Identity Crisis of Black and Jewish Americans in the Late 1960s* (University of New Brunswick, 2012).
Moreover, it is important to clarify that the overview acknowledges alternative readings of presented points and that it does not attempt to advocate any particular perspective – neither the "revisionist" or more traditional, as discussed by Murray Friedman in his study. According to Friedman, revisionist scholarship on Black-Jewish relations frequently promotes the critical view of the alliance, questioning the very existence of such a collation and describing the Jewish involvement in African-American cause "dysfunctional for blacks." More traditional scholarship, which Friedman himself represents, endorses the existence of a Black-Jewish partnership, albeit sometimes marked by suspicion and tension.
Murray Friedman, *What Went Wrong: The Creation and Collapse of Black-Jewish Alliance* (New York: Free Press, 1995) 1-16.

social/historical structure and cultural representation must be considered at the same time when discussing race and, by analogy, ethnicity. Taking account of their statement, as well as the thesis's focus on the literary relations, the overview attempts to outline the historical and socio-political causes and consequences of cooperation and evaluate the role of publishing and press in the history of Black-Jewish relations.

2.2.1 Overview of the Black-Jewish Alliance

In discussing Black-Jewish relations in America, there seem to be two universally accepted points of departure. First, some critics, including Eric J. Sundquist, emphasize the shared status of Jewish and African Americans, a common link based on the metaphor of "strangers" in the American Promised Land and on the ideas belonging originally to Jewish history but refashioned in African-American culture, Exodus and Holocaust.[33]

The second road frequently taken is that of tracing the history of Black-Jewish relations from early stages to the Civil Rights Movement and its aftermaths, employed for instance by Murray Friedman in *What Went Wrong?: The Creation and Collapse of the Black-Jewish Alliance* (1995). Although Friedman does not ignore the Old Testament images and analogies with the Holocaust, his account is rather linear, concentrating on the historical, social and political evolution and dissolution of the alliance.

Friedman's study helps to understand the complexity of Black-Jewish relations, which have been characterized by convoluted "combination of affection and distrust" from the very outset of mutual contact. According to Friedman, even in the period before Civil War, when American Jews were widely scattered and remained "an insignificant minority", a peculiar mixture of sympathy, admiration and suspicion was apparent in the attitude of American Blacks towards Jews, especially in the South, where Jews "enjoyed greater success

[33] See chapters 2.3 and 5.

in business and politics than did Jews living in other sections of the country"[34] due to social hierarchy deeply rooted in plantation and slavery system. On the one hand, Jewish effectiveness in business set an example of a success story, with which numerous Blacks identified and on which they based their hopes. Moreover, Jews were different than other Whites, Friedman observes, "since for the most part they had not been large slaveholders or farmers. While other whites spurned slaves and free blacks, Jewish peddlers sought them out, grateful for customers of whatever race or background."[35]

On the other hand, the suggested beneficial mutuality is already marked by ambivalence. No doubt Jews had to overcome numerous hardships to ensure their social and economic position, a model that theoretically could (and *should*, according to some influential African-American figures such as Booker T. Washington[36]) be followed by American Blacks. However, for this to be possible a crucial precondition had to be fulfilled: Whiteness. Although it is problematic to claim that in the pre-Civil War America Jews were considered White, they were still largely assimilated into the White population, as Karen Brodkin explains in *How Jews Became White Folks* (1998).[37] Jews thus could, unlike Blacks, partially benefit from the system maintained by White mainstream

[34] Friedman, 22.
[35] Friedman, 28-29.
[36] Apart from the admiration of Jewish economic success, Booker T. Washington promoted the idea that blacks should emulate Jews also in the pride they took in their personal and collective ethnic/racial identity. As he wrote in *The Future of the American Negro* (1899): "These people [Jews] have clung together. They have had a certain amount of unity, pride and love race; and, as the years go on, they will be more influential in this country – a country where they were once despised, and looked upon with scorn and derision. It is largely because the Jewish race has had faith in itself. Unless Negro learns more and more to imitate the Jews in these matters, to have faith in himself, he cannot expect to have any high degree of success." Qtd. in Friedman, 35.
[37] In her book, Brodkin provides a useful account of the process of 'whitening' of Jews in America from first immigrants to the post-World War II American prosperity when Jews were integrated into the mainstream (with the exception of Orthodox Jews who resisted the idea of assimilation). According to Brodkin, prior to the great of immigration from Europe, Jews were mostly assimilated into the American society: "The U.S. 'discovery' that Europe was divided into inferior and superior races began with the racialization of the Irish in the mid-nineteenth century and flowered in response to the great waves of immigration form southern and eastern Europe that began in the late nineteenth century. Before that time, European immigrants – including Jews – had been largely assimilated into the white population." Karen Brodkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004) 27.

society. That this status of Jews changed dramatically after 1880 when millions of immigrants arrived in America and anti-immigrant rhetoric regarded Jews as one of the most inferior European races[38] does not annul the fact that the Jewish mercantile success in the antebellum South was possible because "even the poorest, most abject Jews ranked above slaves;"[39] the dynamics that continued to shape post-Civil War America as well. Jewish achievements did not produce only Black sympathy but simultaneously also the pattern of Jewish dominance and African-American dependency, Jewish patronage and Black reliance. Such a pattern can be argued to play an inherent role in mutual relations between the two groups in the first part of the 20th century and during the Civil Rights Movement, as well as in the break-up of the alliance, as many African-American activists and authors began to advocate Black independence, renouncing publicly Jewish assistance.

Examining the Jewish role in African-American civil rights initiatives, the model of Jewish provider-Black recipient may be recognized. For instance, Booker T. Washington's educational institution at Tuskegee, founded in 1881 to train African Americans in industry and agriculture, sought financial ties with the Jewish community. Another example can be seen in one of the most prominent civil rights organizations, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which was likewise financed by wealthy Jewish businessmen. Founded in 1909 by a group of White activists and intellectuals, many of whom were Jewish, and a number of African Americans in response to continuing violence and practice of lynching in the South and to the Springfield race riot of 1908, as well as in order to achieve for Blacks full participation in the American democracy, the NAACP

[38] Supported by studies such as Madison Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916), which categorized Europeans into "three or four major European races, ranging from the superior Nordics of northwestern Europe to the inferior southern and eastern races of the Alpines, Mediterraneans, and worst of all, Jews." Brodkin, 28.
[39] Friedman, 21-23.

has become one of the cornerstones of Black-Jewish partnership.[40] The NAACP, according to Charles T. Davis, created two tools that set the direction of the civil rights effort in the years to come, both of which point also to Jewish involvement – "*The Crisis* magazine, edited by Du Bois, for disseminating information and mobilizing public opinion, and the legal assistance program."[41] The latter's emblematic attainment was participation in the landmark 1954 Supreme Court decision *Brown vs. Board of Education,* which declared segregation in public education unconstitutional.

Decisive for African and Jewish Americans and for their mutual relationship was undoubtedly World War II. Although Jews and Blacks met in unions and the Communist party in the 1930s and 40s, which offered for both groups "the clearest alternative to capitalism amidst the wreck of the Great Depression"[42], it was World War II that turned out to be the milestone in the civil rights efforts and in the shift in Black-Jewish relations. The War, "like the Civil War and World War I before it," Jonathan Kaufman writes, "heightened Black expectations. It was another war for freedom, against prejudice, for the wonders of democracy."[43] And like with the wars before, the change to desegregation was desperately slow and for most Blacks unsatisfactory. The experience of the war was frustrating for African-American soldiers, who returned to America where little had changed in terms of civil rights and where their sacrifice was discounted and where they were not allowed to benefit from the G.I. Bill and from other federal programs.[44] Although some White soldier

[40] Among the prominent Jews who were associated with the NAACP were, for example, the Reform rabbi, Rabbi Stephen Wise, Joel E. Spingarn, a professor of English at Columbia, who served as the NAACP's chairman between the years 1914 and 1934, and his brother Arthur Spingarn, who headed the NAACP's legal fights.

[41] Charles T. Davis, *Black Is the Color of the Cosmos: Essays on Afro-American Literature and Culture, 1942-1981* (New York; London: Garland Publishing, 1982) 13.

[42] Jonathan Kaufman, *Broken Alliance: The Turbulent Times Between Blacks and Jews in America* (New York: Touchstone, 1995) 26.

[43] Kaufman, 44.

[44] According to Brodkin, the G.I. Bills of Rights, providing for instance college and technical school education or cheap home mortgage benefits to World War II veterans, was "arguably the most massive affirmative action program in American history." Unlike Blacks, Jews were able to avail of these laws, which contributed to their admission into the part of White American society that could quite easily enjoy

did change their perspective of African Americans due to the combat experience, they were in minority. Instead of respect, Black soldiers returned to unaltered life of inferiority and often persecution, especially in the South.[45] Increasing frustration towards Southern bigotry and the industrialization of agriculture caused a massive move of African Americans to Northern cities. The migration not only brought African Americans in closer touch with Whites but it also reshaped the space of urban areas. Blacks took immigrants' place in ghettoes and the immigrants, often of Jewish origin, moved to suburban districts, though their business often remained in the cities.[46]

Growing dissatisfaction and heightened involvement in desegregation and integration issues resulted in foundation of a number of civil rights organizations, the most prominent of which were the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), all of which were heavily funded by Jewish resources. Until the mid-1960s, the rhetoric of these organizations was predominantly integrationist, representing "the resurgence of the cosmopolitan strain"[47] embodied in the first half of the 20th century by Du Bois, Booker T. Washington and Frederick Douglass before them. The emblematic figure of the non-violent, integrationist movement was a Baptist minister, the SCLC's co-founder and first president Martin Luther King, Jr., whose "I Have a Dream" speech during the 1963 March on Washington became one of the most significant public statements of the Civil Rights Movement.

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occupational and residential mobility and a middle-class way of life. Although "intrawhite racialization was falling out of fashion," Brodkin writes, these programs systematically discriminated against African Americans, reinforcing thus "white/nonwhite racial distinction," though the category of White broadened to contain Jews and other groups of originally European immigrants. Brodkin, 38, 50.

[45] Jason Sokol, "Prelude: In the Wake of the War, 1945-1955," *There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Right, 1945-1975* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006) 19-25.

[46] Michael Nason, *The Ties That Bind: The Mutual Identity Crisis of Black and Jewish Americans in the Late 1960s* (MA thesis, The University of New Brunswick, 2012) 59-60, UNB Scholar online <https://unbscholar.lib.unb.ca/islandora/object/unbscholar%3A7021/datastream/PDF/view> 24 Oct 2015.

[47] Kaufman, 44.

The cooperation between civil rights organizations, shaped particularly by the non-violent initiatives of Martin Luther King Jr., and financial assistance and legal counsel provided by Jewish benefactors and lawyers peaked in 1964 with the Freedom Summer in Mississippi and the passing of the Civil Rights Act in the same year and of the Voting Rights Act a year later. In the mid-1960s, the goals of the alliance seemed to have been achieved; American Blacks and Jews marched together (see King and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel in the march from Selma to Montgomery in 1965) and even died together (see one Black and two Jewish activists - James Chaney, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman - during the Freedom Summer).

Though a success, new legislation did not automatically bring a truly desegregated and equal society; racism, legal or not, was still pervasive. For lower-class Blacks, change was too slow or not at all. The media's focus on White involvement and casualties far outreached the African-American ones, contributing thus to the dissatisfaction of American Blacks with the gradual integrationist approach. Only five days after President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Bill, violent riots exploded in the Watts ghetto in Los Angeles, leaving 34 people dead, 4,000 arrested and blocks of buildings burned to the ground.[48] The riot uncovered that urban Blacks out of the South neither significantly benefited from nor accepted the non-violent approach and its achievements promoted in the South by King. In the words of James H. Cone, "[t]he Watts riot and others which followed in the urban centers revealed the great gap between Martin's optimism about nonviolence and the despair found in the random acts of violence in the ghettoes of American cities."[49] Instead of King, the urban ghetto Blacks shouted a different name: Malcolm X.

Malcolm X, a Muslim minister, represented an alternative to King's integrationist response to segregation – nationalism. Influenced by, among others, Marcus Garvey and the

[48] James H. Cone, "Shattered Dreams (1965-68)," *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or a Nightmare* (New York: Orbis Books, 2001) Kindle file.
[49] Cone

teaching of the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X advocated separation rather than integration into White society, simultaneously stressing self-determination and strong, positive images of Blacks. Alongside Malcolm X, other activists and organizations embraced more radical nationalist rhetoric, including previously non-violent organizations such as SNCC and CORE. In 1966, Stokely Carmichael became the chairman of SNCC, promoting the slogan of "Black Power". In the same year, the Black Panther Party, a revolutionary organization adopting the Black Power values, was founded. The African-American community found itself in a significant point in history, where the fight against segregation and racial prejudice turned to an intra-Black identity crisis, bolstered by the Black Power movement.

With the radicalization of civil rights organizations came a substantial break with the Jewish community. Calling White support damaging, the advocates of Black nationalism renounced Jewish financial and legal aid. World War II accelerated Jewish assimilation into American society and further ensured their social and economic position, which caused many Blacks to view Jewish help as patronizing. Whatever remained of the similarity between the two groups gradually dissipated in the second half of the 1960s. As Sundquist writes:

> Amidst a rapidly shifting set of historical forces, then, the identification of Blacks with the Jewish experience, nurtured by Jewish traditions of sympathy with the oppressed and allied beliefs that the diminution of prejudice against any people is 'good for the Jews,' became ever more entangled with suspicion on the part of Blacks that Jews were ultimately unlike them, even to the point of exploiting them, and suspicion on the part of Jews that Blacks were ultimately unlike them, even to the point of reviling them.[50]

Accompanying the tension in African-American cultural and political thought was the intra-Jewish discourse on the meaning of Jewishness in the post-World War II decades. The politics of assimilation, generally adopted after the War, were being questioned in the 1960s in connection to several incidents. The trial with a Nazi criminal Adolf Eichmann brought the

[50] Sundquist, 22.

Holocaust back to the public attention, delivering also a sense of justice and awareness of Jewishness among many Jewish Americans. The Six-Day War, or the Arab-Israeli War, in 1967 further drew the attention to the memory of the Holocaust and destabilized fundamentally Jewish sense of safety in America, reminding them that fatal persecution of the Jews did not cease with the end of World War II. Moreover, many African-American spokesmen, including Malcolm X, took the Arab side in the conflict, which widened the rift between the two groups and actualized for Jews the sense of identity threat. "Especially after the Six-Day War of 1967, when Black radicals espoused anti-Zionism that lapsed at times into overt anti-Semitism, American Jews expressed their own new sense of revitalized ethno-political identity – but they did so within a context of increasing secularization, exogamy, and neoconservatism,"[51] Sundquist comments on the implications of the War for Jewish self-identification. Fuelled further by the Ocean-Hill Brownsville incident, when White, predominantly Jewish teachers and administrators were dismissed after the mainly African-American district was opened to community control in 1968 resulting in bitter conflicts and a massive New York City teachers' strike, Jewish focus turned inward, away from African-American concerns.[52]

While the Black community (at least its loudest voices) turned toward radicalism, even more after the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965 and Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968, and rhetoric of the Black Power and Nation of Islam, Jewish community had to face an identity crisis of its own. Post-World War II, and especially in the late 1960s and beginning of the 1970s, what it meant to be a Jewish American and an African American was a question with a large number of intricate, constantly developing answers. Notwithstanding both the more traditional and the revisionist view of the Black-Jewish alliance, the late 1960s brought a turning point in treatment of the other group, as well as of one's own collective identity.

[51] Sundquist, 22.
[52] Nason, 107-109.

Ambivalence and differences apparent from the first mutual contact developed into irreconcilable tensions and frequent hostility.

2.2.2 Press and Publishing

The publication of the NAACP's official magazine *The Crisis* and its first editor-in-chief (in function from the time of its foundation in 1910 to 1934) W. E. B. Du Bois, were crucial for African-American construction and negotiation of identity, as well as for Black-Jewish relations. Published monthly, *The Crisis* represented a platform from which Du Bois, one of the most influential African-American activists, intellectuals and authors, could articulate his ideology and oppose other trends in formation of Black identity, particularly the devotees of Marcus Garvey, founder of the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Garvey's, and UNIA's, separatist program promoted an absolute independence of Blacks on White society and planned to "resettle American blacks in West Africa" by "a black shipping company and on black ships, using black capital," which attracted many African-American followers, especially from lower-class backgrounds. At its height, the UNIA was, as Jonathan Kaufman points out, "the largest organization ever established by blacks, and circulation of Garvey's newspaper far outstripped circulation of *The Crisis*."[53] Although the schemes of the UNIA lost their influence in 1930s, the dedication to Garvey and to the Black nationalism's separatism, Davis writes, "lingered in the minds of many of the frustrated true believers, to emerge with force again in movements like that of the Black Muslim in the 1940s and 1950s."[54]

The role of *The Crisis* cannot be reduced only to voicing Du Bois's political and social arguments. Significantly, the magazine attracted a large audience, both Black and White, thus, giving a public voice to many African-American essayists and artists, including Langston

[53] Kaufman, 44.
[54] Davis, 16.

Hughes or Claude McKay. The publication of the magazine was a part of a broader trend in Northern American cities, mainly, New York. Thanks to the explosion of the American publishing industry after World War I and to Jewish publishing houses, such as Alfred A. Knopf, Ben Huebsch, or Boni&Liveright, African-American authors were enabled to enter the public sphere of literature. Unlike established publishing houses, Jewish publishers, "outsiders to the established industry," did not fear publishing works by Black writers. *The Crisis,*[55] Du Bois and predominantly Jewish publishers gave African-American writers access to a large audience, which culminated in a wave of African-American cultural expression and emancipation, known as the Harlem Renaissance. "These men," George Hutchinson writes in *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (1995), "and their houses were new insurgents in the late teens and early twenties, and they contributed crucially to the dramatic rise of New York as the publishing capital of the nation, without which the Harlem Renaissance as such would have been unthinkable."[56]

The Crisis's influence demonstrates the substantial role of press and publishing in constructing both Black and Jewish identities through mutual contact and cultural appropriation. In the time when African Americans were denied a public voice and were "at best invisible"[57], Jewish, at that time predominantly Yiddish-language, press spoke for them, supporting Blacks in their opposition to racial discrimination and violence. According to Friedman, Yiddish papers such as the *Jewish Daily Forward*, the *Morning Journal*, the *Jewish Daily News*, widely read by the Jewish working class in New York, regularly published, for instance, statistics on lynching, ran long pieces on the history of slavery and the slave trade and provided front-pages to anti-lynching legislation. Underlying the Jewish

[55] Together with other magazines, such as *The Seven Arts, The Masses, The Liberator, The Nation, The New Republic, Opportunity, American Mercury.*
George Hutchinson, "Black Writing and Modernist American Publishing," *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge: Belknap/Harvard UP, 1995) 344.
[56] Hutchinson, 344.
[57] Friedman, 60.

press's support of the Black cause was a belief that the Jewish and Black struggle parallels in a way. Thus the *Forward*, for example, compared the 1917 race riot in the East St. Louis with the 1903 Kishinev pogrom[58] and the Jewish press in general ardently highlighted parallels between the two groups, suggesting a link between African Americans in the US and Jews in Europe. For Jews, Blacks in America were "the most oppressed, the most despised, and the most victimized segment of the population. Blacks seemed, in the eyes of the Jewish writers, 'America's Jews,'" as Hasia Diner writes in her *In the Almost Promised Land* (1977).[59]

Mixed with sympathy and a belief in an essential similarity between the Jewish and the Black cause was undoubtedly Jewish effort to assure their position, as many revisionists of the Black-Jewish relations would be ready to argue. "Uncertain of their status," Goffman explains, "Jews viewed their efforts to recruit Blacks into the cultural center as part of their effort to create an America safe for themselves."[60] In a society free of racial and ethnic discrimination, the Jew can feel safe. The involvement of Jewish press in the African-American struggle for racial equality thus illustrates how separate racial and ethnic identities engage the identity of the other group in the process of securing and renegotiating one's own place in American society.

In the example of *The Crisis* and the Jewish journal *Commentary*, Emily Miller Budick demonstrates that such renegotiation of the Self in society through parallels with and appropriation of the Other was happening on both sides of the Black-Jewish newspaper dialogue. Apart from specifically African-American concerns, *The Crisis*, arguably due to Jewish sponsorship, covered in the years before and during World War II the disenfranchisement of the Jews in Germany, the violence perpetrated against them and finally

[58] Friedman, 60.
[59] Qtd. in Ethan Goffman, *Imagining Each Other: Blacks and Jews in Contemporary American Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000) 14.
[60] Goffman, 15.

their extermination.[61] Inaugurated in 1945 directly in response to the Holocaust, *Commentary* aimed its attention, next to specifically Jewish issues, to Civil Rights, race prejudice and Black-Jewish relations in America. "No other topic," Budick remarks, "received the same kind of extensive treatment as the situation of the American black."[62] Although sharing some common features, such as the existence of trauma precipitating the founding of both journals (slavery and its aftermaths; the Holocaust) or the subject matters of the other groups, "[n]o two journals could seem more different."[63] Examining the implication of the two titles, fundamental differences are revealed; differences which embody the ambiguous appropriation and tension between the two groups.

The title of *The Crisis* appears self-explanatory – African Americans in the first decade of the 20th century, when the journal was founded, as well as in following decades, were in deep crisis," they still had to mount," Budick notes, "the effective campaign that would bring to an end the disabling and often murderous consequences of racism […] They had yet to gain acceptance of their cultural heritage and identity, and recognition of what was increasingly for them the most fundamental fact about American culture: its biracialism." The Jewish *Commentary* does not evoke a state of critical situation but rather a secured position outside disturbances. American Jews after World War II seemed to feel "that they were able to enter into serious but leisured commentary," concerning both the position of American Blacks and the "newly founded State of Israel, with all the questions that the new nation raised about Jewish identity, American or otherwise."[64] The magazines' titles thus illustrate the development outlined in the previous subchapter – while for African Americans, the situation after World War II and even after the passing of new legislations was still predominantly in a state of crisis and the fight for true equality in America was still

[61] Budick, 64.
[62] Budick, 62.
[63] Budick, 64.
[64] Budick, 63-64.

to be fought, Jewish Americans prospered both on social and economic levels. Although they faced many questions concerning ethnic identity, Jews in America could, unlike Blacks, contemplate these from a safe, secure place in society.

2.3 Literary Exchanges: Textuality and Intertextuality

2.3.1 Intertextual Dialogues

Real or fabricated, the Black-Jewish alliance, its thriving during the Civil Rights Movement and its decline in the late 1960s and early 1970s became the concern of numerous literary exchanges. The very discussion of the coalition and mutual relationships has already, to some degree, shifted to the area of literature, as, for example, both the title and the focus of Cynthia Ozick's 1972 influential essay, "Literary Blacks and Jews" indicate. Literary relations between Jewish and African Americans appear to be popular, or at least a frequent, concern of recent scholarship, judging from the number of studies dedicated to this topic.[65] Such a trend is not surprising, considering the role of publishing in Black-Jewish relations and the interest of Jewish and African-American press in the issues of the other group. Moreover, Black and Jewish writers, intellectuals, and academics, Budick writes, "have tended to keep each other in mind,"[66] which can be illustrated just on the titles of some of literary exchanges published in the press. In 1942, African-American historian Lawrence D. Reddick published in *Negro Quarterly* an article entitled "Anti-Semitism among Negroes", to which Louis Harap reacted with "Anti-Negroism among Jews", published in the same issue of the magazine. In 1964, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rabbi Abraham J. Heschel published an essay in *United Synagogue Review* called "What Happens to Them Happens to Me". In 1963, Norman Podhoretz, the editor of *Commentary,* wrote, in reaction to James Baldwin's "A Letter from

[65] See for example studies employed in the thesis by Emily Miller Budick, Eric J. Sundquist, Adam Z. Newton, and Ethan Goffman.
[66] Budick, 1.

a Region in My Mind" an article "My Negro Problem – and Ours", to which Harold Cruse resolutely responded in "My Jewish Problem and Theirs."

As evident from their titles, the texts are "already in the condition of some degree of Black-Jewish intertextuality,"[67] or intertextual dialogue. The exchanges, moreover, do not stand in isolation, they are themselves drawn into older disputes and they stimulate other textual reactions, further reaffirming their intertextuality. Ozick's analysis of Bernard Malamud's *The Tenants* entitled "Literary Blacks and Jews" (1972), for instance, builds on the literary dispute between Irving Howe and Ralph Ellison, which is itself, as observed by Budick, partially an echo of earlier literary reactions of Howe to Baldwin and Ellison to another Jewish critic, Stanley Edgar Hyman. Ozick's analysis and application of the Howe-Ellison debate has generated a large number of critical responses and it seems almost impossible to engage in the theme of literary relations between Blacks and Jews without examining Ozick's emblematic essay, as for example Andrew Furman in his article with a telling title "Revisiting Literary Blacks and Jews" claims.[68]

Black-Jewish intertextuality becomes a part of dialogue in which both groups renegotiate and reconstruct their identities. According to Budick, the notion of dialogue "already involves mutual construction. It means granting and accommodating another individual's perceptions of you as much as of the issues the two of you debate."[69] Judith Butler also contemplates the implication of engaging in a dialogue: "The very notion of 'dialogue' is culturally specific and historically bound, and while one speaker may feel secure that a conversation is happening, another may be sure it is not. The power relations that condition and limit dialogic possibilities need first to be interrogated."[70] For the discussion

[67] Budick, 2.
[68] Andrew Furman, "Revisiting Literary Blacks and Jews," *Midwest Quarterly* 44.2 (Winter, 2003) 131-135, Midwest Quarterly Online <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&an=8947979&scope=site> 29 Feb 2016.
[69] Budick, 2.
[70] Butler, *Gender Trouble* 20.

of Black-Jewish intertextual dialogues, both Budick's and Butler's comments are significant. Literary exchanges between Jews and African Americans attest to the complex process of oscillating between generally American and racially/ethnically distinct identities, employing simultaneously materials of the other group, "which is itself engaged in its own parallel process of ethnic [and racial] construction."[71] To fall into conversation with the Other thus means to form a relation of mutuality, of reciprocal construction. Furthermore, it radically questions the power relations inherent in the very act of conversation, as pointed out by Butler. In this way, the Black-Jewish literary exchanges challenge not only the issues discussed but also the authority of the speakers, or rather writers. "They have to do," Budick remarks, "with a competition between blacks and Jews for authority in American culture,"[72] setting up at the same time a model for American ethnic and racial relations in general.

2.3.2 Ralph Ellison and Irving Howe

Competition over the authority in American cultural discourse is apparent in Ralph Ellison's response to Irving Howe's essay "Black Boys and Native Sons" (1963)[73], in which he accuses the Jewish critic of adopting an "Olympian" tone, allowing him to comment on African Americans, on their experience and purpose of their art. Indeed, Howe in his essay on Richard Wright and those authors he sees as Wright's successors – James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison, repeatedly claims to know African-American reality, which he then reduces to a simplified, unified version of Blackness. For instance, praising Wright's *Native Son*, Howe writes:"Both truth and terror rested on a gross fact which Wright alone dared to confront: violence is central to the life of the American Negro, defining and crippling him

[71] Budick, 5.
[72] Budick, 11.
[73] The Ellison-Howe dispute consists of four articles published during 1963 and 1964 in *Dissent* (Howe's "Black Boys and Native Sons") and *The New Leader* (Howe's "A Reply to Ralph Ellison" and both Ellison's pieces). For simplification, the thesis uses only Howe's first essay and treats Ellison's two responses as one, following thus their joined publication in Ellison's collection *Shadow and Act* (1964).

with a harshness few other Americans need suffer."[74] Later in the essay, he describes the same experience as Baldwin's inevitable inspiration: "Like Wright before him, Baldwin wrote from the intolerable pressures of his experience; *there was no alternative;* each had to release his own agony before he could regard Negro life with the beginnings of objectivity."[75] In his analysis, Howe does not leave out Ellison:

> But even Ellison cannot help being caught up with *the idea* of the Negro. To write simply about 'Negro experience' with the esthetic distance urged by the critics of the fifties, is a moral and psychological impossibility, for plight and protest are inseparable from that experience, and even if less political than Wright and less prophetic than Baldwin, Ellison knows this quite as well as they do.[76]

Ellison's reaction to Howe's comments consists predominantly in two strategies. First, he rejects Howe's assumption that there is no alternative for a Black writer than to draw inspiration from harsh social and economic reality and that the only "real" experience of African Americans is suffering and rage. Such a view, according to Ellison, is highly limiting and it denies individuality: "He [Negro] is no mere product of his socio-political predicament. He is a product of the interaction between his racial predicament, his individual will and the broader American cultural freedom in which he finds his ambiguous existence. Thus he, too, in a limited way, is his own creation."[77] Ellison then supports his rejection of Howe's view of Blackness as of collective experience by listing his own formative literary influences, all coming from Western tradition: "I read Marx, Freud, T.S. Eliot, Pound, Gertrude Stein and Hemingway. […] The same is true of James Baldwin, who is not the product of a Negro store-front church but of the library, and the same is true of me."[78]

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[74] Irving Howe, "Black Boys and Native Sons," *Dissent* 10 (Fall, 1963) 358, Dissent Online <https://www.dissentmahazine.org/article/black-boys-and-native-sons> 14 May 2015.
[75] Howe, 361. (Emphasis added)
[76] Howe, 363.
[77] Ralph Ellison, "The World and the Jug," *Shadow and Act* (New York: Random House, 1964) 112-113.
[78] Ellison, 116.

Consequently, Ellison refuses to be labeled merely as a "Negro" writer, as such a term suggests that "Negroes can only aspire to contest other Negroes"[79] and he insists on being seen as both a Black and as an American writer, representative of the Western literary tradition: "I understand a bit more about myself as Negro because literature has taught me something of my identity as Western man, as political being." "While I am without doubt a Negro, and a writer, I am also an *American* writer."[80] Being an American writer, Ellison demands his work to be judged by the same standards as works by other writers: "I can only ask that my fiction be judged as art; if it fails, it fails aesthetically, not because I did or did not fight some ideological battle."[81] In other words, Ellison opposes Howe by presenting multiplicity of Black experience, equating it with multiplicity of American experience, both on the level of social reality and on the level of literary production and its artistic standards.

Secondly, Ellison calls into question Howe's authority by bringing his Jewishness to the forefront. Seemingly straightforward criticism of Howe's Olympian tone is supplemented by a reference to another Jewish intellectual, Hannah Arendt, by which Ellison indirectly charges Jewish intellectuals with assuming cultural and religious superiority: "It is a lively piece, written with something of the Olympian authority that characterized Hannah Arendt's 'Reflections on Little Rock.'"[82] He then repeatedly refers to Howe's Jewish origin, not letting the readers forget that Howe does not speak from a universal, objectively detached position representing American perspective. Similarly, Howe and other Jewish intellectuals (such as Alfred Kazin and Isaac Rosenfeld, whom Howe quotes in his response to Baldwin's essay) have trouble seeing Blacks as Americans, Ellison shows that the same can be said about Jews in America. Thus, he makes it clear that Howe speaks from Jewish perspective, although Howe himself does not accept Ellison's game and avoids mentioning his Jewishness in their

[79] Ellison, 115.
[80] Ellison, 117, 125.
[81] Ellison, 136-137.
[82] Ellison, 108.

dispute, and resolutely distinguishes between Whites and Jews. "So let me emphasize that my reply to Howe was neither motivated by racial defensiveness nor addressed to *his own racial identity*," (emphasis added) Ellison writes, reminding again of Howe's Jewishness, after which he continues: "It is fortunate that it was not, for considering how Howe identifies himself in this instance, I would have missed the target, which would have been embarrassing. Yet it would have been an innocent mistake, because in situations such as this many Negroes, like myself, make a positive distinction between 'Whites' and 'Jews.'" What appears to be a positive recognition soon develops into criticism:

> Thus I feel uncomfortable whenever I discover Jewish intellectuals writing as though *they* were guilty of enslaving my grandparents, or as though the *Jews* were responsible for the system of segregation. Not only do they have enough troubles of their own, as the saying goes, but Negroes know this only too well. The real guilt of such Jewish intellectuals lies in their facile, perhaps unconscious, but certainly unrealistic, identification with what is called the 'power structure.'[83]

Ellison's comment in a way parallels Butler's thoughts on dialogue – to engage in a literary exchange concerning the cultural authority implies questioning the position of the writers. The Howe-Ellison dispute thus can be said to reflect a broader discussion over who has to right to speak for the American culture, whose voice is, as Budick puts it, "America's own truest representation of itself."[84]

For Ellison, it initially appears to be both, the Jew and the Black, whose voice represents the universal in American (and Western) culture: "I am as writer no less a custodian of the American language than is Irving Howe."[85] Ellison's continual insistence on his Americanness and Howe's Jewishness nevertheless complicates such an interpretation. In a passage concerning what makes a Black American, Ellison claims: "It involves, too,

[83] Ellison, 126.
[84] Budick, 53.
[85] Ellison, 126.

a special attitude toward the waves of immigrants who have come later and passed us by,"[86] signifying clearly that in a dialogue between the Jew and the African American, it is the latter and not the [Jewish] immigrant who speaks from the inside of American culture.

The question of authority in American culture gets even more complex when the aspect of religion is added into the discussion. Ellison's criticism of Howe's simplistic view of Black experience invokes African-American memory of slavery and Christianity's roots in the Old Testament: "It requires real poverty of the imagination to think that this [self-understanding] can come to a Negro *only* through the example of *other Negroes*, especially after the performance of the slaves in re-creating themselves, in good part, out of the images and myths of the Old Testament."[87] Ellison here touches the theme that has been discussed in more detail by James Baldwin in his essays, some of which complement the Ellison-Howe dispute, especially when juxtaposed with another Jewish-authored essay, Cynthia Ozick's "Metaphor and Memory" (1986).

2.3.3 James Baldwin and Cynthia Ozick

In one of his few essays dealing directly with Black-Jewish relation in America,[88] "The Harlem Ghetto" (1955), Baldwin acknowledges certain identification with Jews based on the fact that the tropes and metaphors traditionally accepted as essential for Black identity are actually of Jewish origin: "The more devout Negro considers he is a Jew, in bondage to a hard taskmaker and waiting for a Moses to lead him out of Egypt. The hymns, the texts, and the more favored legends of the devout Negro are all Old Testament and therefore Jewish in origin: the flight from Egypt, the Hebrew children in the fiery furnace, the terrible jubilee

[86] Ellison, 131.
[87] Ellison, 117.
[88] It is important to add, however, that Baldwin regularly comments on Black-Jewish relations in his essays but these comments do not represent the main focus of the texts. Thus, for example, in *The Fire Next Time* (1963) he recalls that it was his dealing with Jewish classmates during high school years that brought the question of color to the center of his mind; or in "Many Thousands Gone" (1955) he uses the commonly accepted presumption that blacks do not have the same kind of tradition as Jews to prove the opposite.

songs of deliverance."[89] Identification with the Jew is nevertheless ambivalent and is always imperfect; the reality in Harlem problematizes a positive view of mutuality: "Jews in Harlem are small tradesmen, rent collectors, real estate agents, and pawnbrokers; they operate in accordance with the American business tradition of exploiting Negroes, and they are therefore identified with oppression and are hated for it."[90]

Significantly, neither Jews nor Blacks seem to be responsible for such hostility in "The Harlem Ghetto." Baldwin makes it clear that the tension between Negroes and Jews is the outcome of the manipulation coming from the White mainstream, Christian society which thus attempts to maintain its own position. In Baldwin's view, the system creates an environment, in which "Jews, like Negroes, must use every possible weapon in order to be accepted, and must try to cover their vulnerability by a frenzied adoption of the customs of the country; and the nation's treatment of Negroes is unquestionably a custom."[91] Such a view conveys a complex set of implications. Not only is Christianity in American in tension with Judaism but it is a part of the systematic exploitation of Blacks and other minorities, supporting thus simultaneously a fundamental intra-religious rift between White and Black Christianity.[92] Moreover, integral to Baldwin's stance in "The Harlem Ghetto" is consequently the emphasis on the status of a minority of both Jews and Negroes: "The structure of the American commonwealth has trapped these minorities into attitudes of perpetual hostility."[93] According to Baldwin, both the Jew and the Black stand outside the mainstream culture, locked in an ambiguous relationship of identification and hostility, endorsed by power relations in America.

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[89] James Baldwin, "The Harlem Ghetto," *Collected Essays* (New York: Library of America, 1998) 49.
[90] Baldwin, "The Harlem Ghetto," 50.
[91] Baldwin, "The Harlem Ghetto," 51.
[92] Baldwin discusses the relationship between Christianity and the system of power relations in America supporting the belief in Blacks' inferiority further for example in "White Racism or World Community?" (1968).
[93] Baldwin, "The Harlem Ghetto," 51.

In Baldwin's other essays, especially in the "Stranger in the Village" (1955) and "Negroes Are Anti-Semitic Because They're Anti-White" (1967), the minority status of Jews in America is radically questioned. Particularly in the latter essay, Baldwin not only makes no distinction between Jewish and White Americans but he proposes that such categories are no longer relevant, as Jews are in fact indistinguishable from other White Americans. Consequently, Baldwin sees Jews as insiders in American society, suggesting their part in the history of the system of exploitation and violence: "The ultimate hope for a genuine black-white dialogue in this country lies in the recognition that the driven European serf merely created another serf here, and created him on the basis of color. No one can deny that the Jew was a party to this," Baldwin argues but adds: "it is senseless to assert that this was because of his Jewishness."[94] In the earlier "Stranger in the Village," Baldwin's argumentation is not yet that radical towards the Jewish position in America but he already rejects the premise of shared outsider status of Jewish and African Americans that he was able to imagine in "The Harlem Ghetto."

Published in the same collection *Notes of a Native Son* (1955) as "The Harlem Ghetto," the final essay of the book "Stranger in the Village" calls attention to the Biblical trope commonly regarded as crucial in discussing shared experience of Blacks and Jews in America – the metaphor of strangers. Although not written directly as a response to Baldwin's essay, "Stranger in the Village," in this respect, resonates strongly, as Budick points out, with Ozick's "Metaphor and Memory" (1986). In her essay, Ozick links the experience of slavery and imagination of the stranger with Jewish culture. Coming from the Old Testament scripture of Leviticus, the metaphor suggests mutual empathy based on the analogous position of the outcast.[95] Contrasting Jews with ancient Greeks, who were, in her

[94] James Baldwin, "Negroes Are Anti-Semitic Because They're Anti-White," *Collected Essays* (New York: Library of America, 1998) 747.
[95] "But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love his as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt." Leviticus 19:34

words "proud of despising the stranger" and who as a society "never undertook to imagine what it was to be the Other; the outsider; the alien; the slave; the oppressed;"[96] Ozick emphasizes Jews' preoccupation with history and memory of slavery and "four hundred years of torment," out of which a metaphor was made: "It came about because thirty generations of slavery in Egypt were never forgotten."[97] This metaphor was further transformed into moral imperative of reciprocity and identification with the Other, which has become a part of Jewish consciousness. Significantly, Ozick connects ancient Greece's system of slavery to America: "In our own country," Ozick writes about the US, "slavery thrived under the wing of a freedom-proclaiming Constitution until the middle of the last century."[98]The concluding sentence of the essay – "We strangers can imagine the familiar hearts of the stranger"[99] – thus affirms the mutuality of Blacks and Jews in American context.

For Baldwin the core of this assumption is based on fundamental misconception. In "Stranger in the Village," he compares his status of an outsider in a Swiss village with his position of an insider in America: "I Am a stranger here. But I am not a stranger in America."[100] While Ozick claims for both Jewish and African Americans the status of a stranger, writing in fact from the center of American culture as Baldwin would probably argue, Baldwin himself refuses to accept the role of the Other, promoting the view of Blacks as the constituent part of American society and culture. His comparison of the US and Europe demonstrates the idea of mutually constructed identity of Blacks and Whites in America:

> If they [Blacks] posed any problem at all for the European conscience, it was a problem which remained comfortingly abstract: in effect, the black man, as *a man*, did not exist for Europe. But in America, even as a slave, he was an inescapable part of the general social fabric and no American could escape having an attitude toward him. Americans

[96] Cynthia Ozick, "Metaphor and Memory," *Metaphor and Memory* (New York: Vintage, 1991) 277.
[97] Ozick, "Metaphor and Memory" 277-278.
[98] Ozick, "Metaphor and Memory" 280.
[99] Ozick, "Metaphor and Memory" 283.
[100] James Baldwin, "Stranger in the Village," *Collected Essays* (New York: Library of America, 1998) 124.

> attempts until today to make an abstraction of the Negro, but the very nature of these abstractions reveals the tremendous effects the presence of the Negro has had on the American character.[101]

It is then not the Old Testament trope but the interracial construction of American society that Baldwin repeatedly adverts to in his essays, not the position outside American culture that Ozick suggests for both Blacks and Jews but the founding part of that culture. Baldwin's stranger, in Budick's words, "serves to identify, in order to condemn, the internal dynamics of American culture itself."[102] The imagined dialogue between Baldwin and Ozick thus echoes, or prefigures,[103] the exchange between Ralph Ellison and Irving Howe, whose literary conflict over the cultural authority in America also builds on renegotiation of the insider-outsider dynamics.

For both Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin, the Black is at home in America, not a stranger, he is "shaped by the American experience"[104] and the American experience is, in turn, shaped by the contact with the Black, as Baldwin asserts in the final paragraph of "Stranger in the Village": "The time has come to realize that the interracial drama acted out on the American continent has not created a new black man, it has created a new white man, too."[105] It is then the Black, not the Jew, who has the right to become the voice of American culture. For Irving Howe and Cynthia Ozick, although their stance on ethnic particularism (Ozick) and universalism (Howe) seem to differ in the discussed exchanges, Jewish history and experience precede and transcend the African-American, as well as generally American one, allowing them to assume the role of a spokesperson for Western culture.

[101] Baldwin, "Stranger in the Village" 125.
[102] Budick, 42.
[103] The fact that Ozick's essay was published more than three decades after Baldwin's "Stranger in the Village" makes it difficult to place the exchange on a timeline. At the same time, it illustrates how certain concepts and tensions have continued to shape the public discourse on Black-Jewish relations.
[104] Ellison, 131.
[105] Baldwin, "Stranger in the Village" 129.

Chapter 3 - "The Anguish of the Other": Mutuality in Malamud's Fiction

3.1 Bernard Malamud's Mirrors

For an experienced Malamud reader, the claim that there are numerous mirror images in Malamud's works is hardly a surprise. For instance, Malamud's second novel *The Assistant* (1957) is infused with mirror reflections, which follow characters' inner torments and the protagonist's conversion. Thus, the first description of Frank Alpine, the title character of the novel who robs the shop of Jewish owner, Morris Bober, is accompanied by his staring into a cracked mirror above the sink, at which he repeatedly looks after he makes Morris hire him as an assistant to redeem his guilt. Throughout the book, Frank frequently studies his fragmented reflection in the cracked mirror and looks for his real Self, a Self that would integrate his past with his present and future. When, haunted by his past deeds, Frank doubts his prospects, he is unable to confront his reflection in the mirror: "He was afraid to look into the mirror for fear it would split apart and drop into the sink."[1] His assertion to Helen, Morris's daughter, about his inner change is likewise paralleled with examination of his reflection: "He gazed with burning eyes in a bony face, with sad regret, at his reflection."[2] The novel is full of similar moments and the fact that Frank still sees himself as a cracked image in the mirror at the novel's end underlines the ambiguity of his conversion to Judaism.

The opening sentence of *The Tenants* signifies that reflection will play an important role in Malamud's sixth novel as well: "Lesser catching sight of himself in his lonely glass wakes to finish his book."[3] Similarly, as with the cracked mirror in *The Assistant*, the protagonist of *The Tenants*, Jewish writer Harry Lesser, cannot see his reflection clearly, as the passing glance and the verb, implying not yet fully conscious state of mind, indicate.

[1] Bernard Malamud, *The Assistant* (New York: Avon Books, 1980) 102.
[2] Malamud, *The Assistant* 293.
[3] Bernard Malamud, *The Tenants* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971) 3.
All subsequent references to the novel are cited in the text in the following manner: (*The Tenants*, page number).

The following passage in *The Tenants*, depicting accentuated sensory perception and his efforts to fall asleep again, further confirms Lesser's state between sleeping and being fully awake. Both Frank Alpine and Harry Lesser thus can see themselves only as fragmented or unclear images; as Selves facing not entirely identical but still somehow familiar Selves - the Selves' Doubles. For a novel dealing with Black-Jewish relations such an opening is of crucial importance. Lesser's reflection at the beginning of the novel foreshadows the ambiguous relationship of mutuality he develops with his counterpart, or his Double, African-American writer Willie Spearmint, which, in a way, can be seen as a parallel of many problematic issues concerning Black-Jewish relations in general.

To understand Malamud's use of reflections, doubling, and mutuality, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by the Double. In his "The Double as Incomplete Self: Toward a Definition of Doppelgänger," Clifford Hallam provides a useful account of the concept and its application to literature. According to Hallam, the concept of the Double can be understood more fully and clearly using a psychoanalytic approach, even though the Double motif can be traced to mythology and folklore. Hallam starts his essay by referencing Sigmund Freud and his view of the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious, which can be compared to the visible and invisible parts of an iceberg: "the tip above water, while the larger portion remains outs of sight."[4] To discover the underwater part of the psyche, to "disclose the metaphorical unknown portion of the self" and thus to become a better-integrated identity is, in Hallam's view, the ultimate goal of psychoanalysis.

At the beginning of approaching the Double then stands the notion of fragmentation, the incompleteness of the Self. This lack of unity is, significantly, betrayed in language, in common expressions like "broken up," "going to pieces," and "out of his mind," Hallam

[4] Clifford Hallam, "The Double as Incomplete Self: Toward a Definition of Doppelgänger," *Fearful Symmetry: Papers From the Fifth Annual Florida State University Conference on Literature and Film*, ed. Eugene Joseph Crook (Tallahassee: University Press of Florida, 1981) 1.

points out with reference to Carl F. Keppler's *The Literature of the Second Self* (1972).[5] Partially aware of its fragmentation, the Self then tries to complete itself by a relationship with its Double, which is in literature frequently embodied as a different character or numerous characters. Hallam illustrates this projection of missing part of personality to another character with the example of Don Quixote, whose fanciful idealism is completed by Sancho's enormous practicality.[6]

The missing, unknown parts of the Self are, in psychoanalytical perspective, those portions of personality that have been downplayed or repressed. Hallam explains this view on Freud's concept of the uncanny (unheimlich, derived from "heimlich," meaning homelike, familiar). The uncanny is, as Freud explains in "The Uncanny" (1919), "that class of terrifying that leads us back to something long known to us, once very familiar." The experience of the uncanny, which can take various forms such as relived fantasies, dreams, or recurring characters, is then a revision of the mechanism of repression, or "the return of the repressed."[7] While Freud was interested in the possibility of integration and completion of the Self on the level of individual unconsciousness, Carl Gustav Jung, another leading psychoanalyst, dealt with similar issue of desirable wholeness on the level of collective unconsciousness.

Wholeness in Jung's account can be achieved by recognizing and harmonizing with archetypes, which represent innate, collectively shared experience of mankind, patterns of thought, and even some submerged aspects of the psyche, "which we inherit like genetic characteristics from our ancestors." In general, Hallam argues, "the basic archetypes of the impersonal unconscious – anima/animus, Wise Old Man/Great Mother, and the Self – are all Doubles and, in both their benign and malevolent aspects, can be used to explain the

[5] Hallam, 4.
[6] Hallam, 4-5.
[7] Qtd. in Hallam, 14.

obligatory struggles and confrontations of the hero in world of literature."[8] Jung's doctrine of the Shadow further illuminates the psychoanalytic treatment of the Double. To become conscious of one's Shadow, Jung contends, "involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge, and it therefore, as a rule, meets considerable resistance."[9] The Shadow, Hallam adds, is not necessarily repulsive; it may appear as the less developed, refined, or "gauche component of the ego."[10]

In both Freud and Jung, the Self is incomplete prior to recognizing and coming to terms with the hidden, repressed, previously unacknowledged part of its own personality, or with the archetype. In literature, such a recognition and effort to achieve harmony happens frequently in the encounter with the Double, who represents those submerged parts of the Self. In this perspective, the Self can be said to require the Double to complete itself. The hidden, cast-off Other can therefore be seen as a necessary component for constructing one's identity, which provides a possible link with Butler's abject beings.[11]

Because repudiation of the abject being (the part of identity that was cast off or repressed in the process of identification with regulatory ideal) is an integral part of performativity, it is not a one-time gesture but a repetitive action and it thus continues to determine the subject and persists "as a kind of defining negativity." As a result, the Self is never complete, it is "never coherent and never self-identical precisely because it is founded and, indeed, continually refounded, through a set of defining foreclosures and repressions that constitute the discontinuity and incompletion of the subject."[12] This incompleteness, Butler

[8] Hallam, 16.
[9] Qtd. in Hallam, 17.
[10] Hallam, 17.
[11] See chapter 2.1.1.
[12] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York; London: Routledge, 1993) 190.

continues, will "return to haunt the claims of identity defined through negation."[13] Similarly to the concept of the Double, Butler's emphasis on the chronic incompleteness of the Self then implies hypothetical wholeness only in the relationship with the Other, the character's Double.

Jewish characters in Malamud's fiction attempt to do precisely that – they look for a missing, suppressed part of their Selves in the mutual relationship with the Other, although they are not fully conscious of the implication of their actions. The Other, for Malamud, Steven G. Kellman observes, may be diverse: "[M]ost of Malamud's fiction focuses on the confrontation between a Jew and an Other, and whether the latter is black, Italian, Russian, American Indian, or even chimpanzee, Jewish-black relations are the author's paradigm for the strained encounters of the self with its doppelganger."[14] Even though Jewish protagonists in "Angel Levine," "Black Is My Favorite Color," and *The Tenants* also encounter non-African-American characters who could be said to function as their Doubles, such as Jewish landlord Levenspiel as Emily Miller Budick emphasizes,[15] Blackness in these works represents the "overarching symbol of Otherness – the Mother Other,"[16] the predominant Double required for desirable completion of the Self.

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[13] Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 221.

[14] Steven G. Kellman, "Tenants, Tenets, and Tensions: Bernard Malamud's Blacks and Jews," *American Literary Dimensions: Poems and Essays in Honor of Melvin J. Friedman*, ed. Ben Siegel and Jay L. Halio (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999) Literature Resource Center <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CH1420052566&v=2.1&u=karlova&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w&asid=2e91da235c2eb5373045a9ae63fb9ced> 19 May 2015.

[15] Emily Miller Budick uses the character of Levenspiel to illustrate that *The Tenants* is no less about intra-Jewish message than it is about race relations: "This Jewish-Jewish relationship […] precedes the Lesser-Spearmint one. […] Indeed, it's [the novel's] interest in race may well be a cover (perhaps more unintentional than willed) for its more fraught intra-Jewish message."
Emily Miller Budick, *Black and Jews in Literary Conversation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 12.

[16] Ethan Goffman, *Imagining Each Other: Blacks and Jews in Contemporary American Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000) 130.
Goffman's statement does not apply to *The Tenants* but to Saul Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, published in 1970, a year before Malamud's novel. In Bellow's book, the black Other, a pickpocket, stands for the ultimate Double in contact with whom the title character, intellectual and Holocaust survivor Artur Sammler, inspects limitations of his universalist view of civilization, of "his planet." It is through the contact with the Black Other that Sammler tries to apprehend the collectivity of numerous "little" Others

It is then possible to read "Angel Levine," as Goffman aptly points out in his *Imagining Each Other: Blacks and Jews in Contemporary American Literature* (2000), as Manischevitz's coming to terms with his repressed sexuality: "In one reading of the story Manischevitz accepts his own sexuality in accepting Levine as an angel. His initial suffering, then, is metaphorical for his repressed libido; he can never be content until he accepts his sexuality. The Otherness expressed by blackness represents a bifurcated psyche that must be made whole."[17] Similarly, the protagonist and narrator of "Black Is My Favorite Color" attempts to befriend and later engage in an intimate relationship with African Americans in order to substitute his own lack of spontaneity and liveliness: "I went there as much as I could because the street was full of life," Nat Lime says about the Black neighborhood, "[t]he musicians played their banjos and saxophones and the houses shook with the music and laughter."[18] In *The Tenants*, the Black writer, Willie Spearmint, becomes Harry Lesser's Double, the embodiment of his regret of unlived life and instinctive, imaginative writing, unspoiled by excessively limiting form.[19]

The Self and the Double can thus be understood as parts of the same mirror image; they both search for an image of itself in the Other in an effort to near self-completion, hence possibly Malamud's recurrent references to mirrors and reflections. Construction of both the Jewish Self and the Black Other always require the Other, its constitutive outside, or its once familiar but now estranged Double, against and through which it re-establishes its own identity. Budick's claim that the character of the Jewish landlord in *The Tenants* diverts the attention from Black-Jewish to intra-Jewish message thus opens way for recognizing the

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represented by youth characters, such as Sammler's nieces, daughter, or son-in-law who stand for pseudo-intellectualism, troubled over-sexualization, or belligerent Zionism.

[17] Goffman, 70.

[18] Bernard Malamud, "Black Is My Favorite Color," *Idiots First* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969) 23. All subsequent references to the short story will be cited in the text in the following manner: (Favorite Color, page number).

[19] It is important to realize that such an interpretation is, however, problematic in the way it gives preference to the Jewish Self. The Other could be argued to function as a tool the Jewish protagonists use to achieve better-integrated identities, reducing thus frequently the Other to stereotypes.

performatively constructed nature of the Jewish Self in the selected texts: "African-Jewish American relations may have less to do with external, objective socioeconomic, political, or even cultural realities than they do with Jewish self-conceptions and with the place of the African American in these self-conceptions."[20] Such a statement returns partially to Omi and Winant's notion of racial projects, which take into consideration not only the external realities but cultural representation as well, including literary portrayals. The Jewish Self, as well as the Black Other, reacts not to its counterpart as such but to a complex set of "accumulated signifiers"[21] that it searches for in, or projects to, the Other. As Iska Alter writes about the protagonists of *The Tenants*: "Harry and Willie respond not to each other directly but to the multiplicity of projected images that build walls and insure frustration, anger, and hate."[22] In this sense, the analysis of the portrayals of their Doubles may reveal how they construct their own Selves, which again points at the significant role of literature in the mutual relationship between Jewish and African Americans.

3.2 Constructing the Jewish Self

"If it's news to you I'm Jewish myself," (*The Tenants*, 41) says Harry Lesser in response to Willie Spearmint's anti-Semitic slur aimed at Levenspiel. Significantly, it is the first confirmation of Lesser's Jewishness, and the second instance of the word 'Jew' or 'Jewish' in the novel; both of which are deliberately pronounced as insults. In "Black Is My Favorite Color," the recognition of the protagonist's ethnic identity comes likewise from the outside. After almost five pages of Nat Lime's narration, the assertion of Jewishness

[20] Budick, 12.
[21] Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015) Kindle file.
[22] Iska Alter, "*The Fixer, The Tenants*, and the Historical Perspective," *The Good Man Dilemma: Social Criticism in the Fiction of Bernard Malamud* (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1981) Literature Resource Center <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CH1420047440&v=2.1&u=karlova&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w&asid=2589eca73927af909a5856bd6adddcb8> 19 May 2015.

comes in a violent and intense attack from his childhood acquaintance, a Black boy named Buster:

> One day when I wasn't expecting it he hit me in the teeth. I felt like crying but not because of the pain. I spit blood and said, 'What did you hit me for? What did I do to you?'
>
> 'Because you a *Jew* bastard. Take your *Jew* movies and your *Jew* candy and shove them up you *Jew* ass.'
>
> And he ran away. (My Favorite Color, 25; emphasis added)

The protagonists of both works do not identify themselves as Jewish prior to the contact with the Black Other; their ethnic identity is recognized only in the form of response to or defense against classification made from the outside. Such a reiteration and reconstruction of the characters' Jewishness from the outside echoes Sartre's notorious negative definition: "The Jew is one whom other men consider a Jew […] the stranger, the intruder."[23] Malamud himself possibly recalls Sartre's characterization of Jewishness in *The Tenants* through the notion of negative presence: "Was it somebody real? Negative presence as though on film? The white figure of a black man haunting the halls?" (*The Tenants,* 199) Both Nat Lime and Harry Lesser thus need the Black Other to define them as Jewish.

Significantly, Malamud provides Harry Lesser and Nat Lime enough space to express their Selves before he makes them meet the Other, which is important in reading the way Jewishness is constructed. Nat Lime is thus able to classify himself by skin color, as a member of White mainstream society instead by culture or religion, classification which is again dependent on the existence of the Other: "I like a black person if not because he's black, then because I'm white. […] If I wasn't white my first choice would be black." (Favorite Color, 22) Although the story provides clues for recognizing distinct ethnic and

[23] Qtd. in Sundquist, 387.

racial identities of the characters without directly stating them,[24] the fact that Nat Lime is the narrating consciousness of the story enables the focus on the part of his identity he himself chooses to give preference to, in other words - his whiteness, which he defines against and through blackness of the abject being, the African-American Other.

In order to achieve his preferred White identity, Nat needs to downplay, repudiate his Jewishness, which is mediated again by the narration allowing the reader to enter Nat's mind and study his self-conception. In the opening sentence of the story, for example, Nat deliberately, although indirectly, negates the Jewish Self by calling attention to violating Orthodox Judaism by eating non-kosher food: "Charity Sweetness sits in the toilet eating her two hardboiled eggs while I'm having my ham sandwich and coffee in the kitchen." (Favorite Color, 21) Later in the opening paragraph, Nat Lime informs the reader, again obliquely, that his mother has passed away, information which gains importance later in the story when he recalls his mother's words: "Nathan, she said, if you ever forget you are a Jew a goy will remind you," (Favorite Color, 28) the goy being in the story paradoxically always an African American.

From these instances and from Nat's self-identification as White, it becomes apparent that he had to suppress, to disavow his Jewishness in order to fulfill the normative ideal of Whiteness. The numerous references to his mother throughout the narration nevertheless reveal that he is still aware of his Jewishness, despite his attempts to shed his past.[25] The Jewish Self is then torn between identification and repudiation, between preferred and externally ascribed identities, always in the state of doubleness, or "double consciousness".[26]

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[24] See chapter 5.2.

[25] An interesting parallel could be made at this point with Philip Roth's *The Human Stain* (2000), in which the African-American protagonist Coleman Silk chooses to pass as Jewish (white), shedding his past but still painfully aware of his hidden identity.

[26] Goffman, 11.
Ethan Goffman employs W.E.B. Du Bois's term outside its original context and uses it to explain self-hatred of many Jews in America. Discussing at first Karl Marx's identification of Jewishness with capitalism, resulting thus in Marx's self-hating anti-Semitism, Goffman shifts his focus to the American

Because identity construction always requires recognition on not only a social, but on a personal level, Nat Lime's Jewish Self is ascribed to him despite his effort to reject his Jewish identity; it is made prominent again in contact with the Black Other, the submerged Self in the form of its Double, or numerous Doubles. Nat Lime's Jewish Self then can be seen as performatively constructed in the way it requires a constitutive outside, an abject being that continually determines and reinvents his Self as a kind of construing negativity. Moreover, his Self, both the preferred and the ascribed one, is dependent on the regulatory ideal of racial hierarchy, on the discourse of Black-White opposition. Nat's relationship with African Americans confirms and reinvents the ideal of normative Whiteness, which is repeatedly reiterated both by the Black Other and by Nat himself, though it is concealed by his ostensible affection and liberalism. In both identification and repudiation, Nat Lime participates in the exploitive system, in the discourse of racial hierarchy, even though that is exactly what he tries to deny, as the very title of the story and the repetition of the phrase throughout the story indicate.

Malamud's treatment of the Jewish Self in *The Tenants* affirms the view of identity as being performatively constructed. Not only that the Self, similarly as in "Black Is My Favorite Color", depends on the outside for its identification and it balances between

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context: "In America, too, Jews moving from ghetto into mainstream society suffered alienation similar to that encountered by the Black bourgeoisie." According to Goffman, Jewish writers and activists in America were urged "to disavow their Jewishness, to create a generic universalism. […] Qualities of Otherness, embedded in the social psyche, were simultaneously invisible and omnipresent." Goffman, 11.

Double consciousness of the Jewish Self is manifested also, for example, in Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969), where the protagonist Alexander Portnoy enacts a neurosis through his contempt and hatred toward both the Jewish and the gentile worlds, or in Malamud's short story "The Jewbird" (1963), a story that has been by some added to Malamud's works dealing with black-Jewish relations (for example by Eric J. Sundquist, Adam Z. Newton, or Emily Miller Budick), in which the black bird named Schwartz demonstrates that it is possible to be a Jew and something else at the same time - a Jew and a black bird, similarly as it is possible in "Angel Levine" to be a Jew and a black angel. As Adam Z. Newton notes about "The Jewbird": "This dual identity – the Jewbirdness of Jews – and its potential for dual loyalties, of course, divides in two: internally, in the form of Jewish self-understanding, and externally, contingent on (mis)recognitions from without." Adam Zachary Newton, *Facing Black and Jew: Literature as Public Space in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge, UK; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 116.

attraction and denial by which it reaffirms the discourse of normative Whiteness, it also contemplates the non-essential view of identity and its implications. The opening line of the novel and Harry's reflection is, according to Budick, one of many reflections that the writer produces: "Throughout the novel, Harry is represented as a reflection of someone or something else, a coil of self-reflexivities with nothing substantial at center to provide meaning to the still other insubstantial reflections he generates."[27] The coil of repetition, of numerous reflections, constitutes the effect where a substance is missing, which can be demonstrated by the example of Lesser's novel.

Lesser's book in progress, entitled, rather ironically, *The Promised End*, is a reflection of another book, a text about a writer, Lazar Cohen, "who is often afflicted by the thought that he wasted more of his life than he was entitled to, or essence therefore," and who, similarly as Lesser himself, wakes night after night "in sweaty fright of himself, stricken by anxiety because he finds it hard to give love." (*The Tenants*, 192) The name of Lesser's alter-ego, Cohen, itself points to a multiple level of reflections: Cohen (Kohen) was Lesser's real-life friend, a painter, who same as Lesser found himself unable to finish his masterpiece, a portrait of a woman: "She was simply the uncompleted woman of an incomplete man," (*The Tenants*, 111) Lesser contemplates, confessing indirectly his own lack of integrity.[28] "You looked into mirrors and saw mirrors and didn't know what was right or real or important,"[29] Malamud writes about Frank Alpine in *The Assistant* and could as well about Harry Lesser in *The Tenants*.

Lesser's novel facilitates the view of the writer's unstable, fluid Jewish identity also by the references to Christianity, as Budick observes: "Lesser is producing a recognizably

[27] Budick, 17.
[28] The name Cohen appears again in Malamud's writings, as Budick points out, in the name of the protagonist of his post-apocalyptic novel *God's Grace* (1982), Calvin Cohn, which suggests possible reflection of Lesser, who himself is a reflection of Lazar Cohen who is in the same way a mirror image of Lesser's friend, the painter and his struggle with incompleteness. Budick, 18.
[29] Malamud, *The Assistant* 145.

Christian and American, as opposed to Jewish, text."[30] Indeed, the routine arguments between Lesser and the landlord Levenspiel remind of a Christian-Jewish dialogue with the writer clearly advocating the Christian stance. It is in his insistence on favoring his novel over real-life misfortune of others that his American-Christian parts of the Self are revealed: "For Christ's sake, what are you writing, the Holy Bible?" Levenspiel asks in frustration. "Who can say? Who really knows? […] When you read it, Levenspiel, even you will love me. It will help you understand and endure your life as the writing of it has helped me sustain mine," (*The Tenants,* 22) Lesser explains and his earlier remark further confirms his engrossment in Christian culture: "I don't write on Sundays." (*The Tenants,* 20) The images and references coming from the Old Testament are those that have been traditionally appropriated and reinvented in Christian terms in American context, as well as in African-American culture.[31] Thus Lesser's vision of himself as "Moses himself climbing down the burning rock, Ten lit Commandments tucked under his arm," (*The Tenants*, 184) invokes his generally American rather than specifically Jewish Self.

Lesser's *The Promised End* appears to be less an original text than a reflection, rewriting of the archetypal view of America as the Promised Land (similar to texts such as Mary Antin's autobiography *Promised Land*). After Willie burns Harry's manuscript, rewriting, creating the same story again is precisely what Lesser does. Lesser's writer's block and his inability to find the right end for his novel may then be understood, Budick notes, "as having to do with his lack of something significant and new to write about."[32] Because Lesser's Self and his book are fundamentally intertwined, "Lesser writes his book and his book writes Lesser," (*The Tenants,* 193), the comment on the manuscript, "something essential missing", (*The Tenants,* 112) applies to Lesser's identity as well: there is a lack of essence in his Self, he is a reflection in a coil of reflections, repetitions, and cultural

[30] Budick, 17.
[31] See chapters 2.3 and 5.
[32] Budick, 17.

appropriations. In this context, Malamud's references to literary tradition such as to William Shakespeare, Mark Twain, Joseph Conrad, S. T. Coleridge, William Wordsworth or William Blake may be seen as fragments or reflections which Lesser puts together to produce an effect of the Self.

Harry's confrontation with the Black Other, his African-American Double, makes his fragmentation and incompleteness evident. After he visits the gallery where his friend's painting is exhibited, contemplating his own unfinished and wanting book, he encounters "a blue-hatted black woman in the lobby [who] drops a mirror out of her cloth handbag and it shatters on the floor." Considering Malamud's use of mirrors, the attentive reader anticipates a significant interplay of meanings. "In it he sees himself, unshaven, gloomy, gaunt; it comes from not writing. The black woman spits on the fragment of mirror Lesser has given her. He backs off." (*The Tenants*, 112-113) Not only that the broken mirror parallels Lesser's own fragmentation and lack of essential unity of the Self, as well as the multiple reflecting Malamud incorporates into the passage by adverting to Lesser's writing, it also depicts Lesser as taking hold of pieces of African-American culture and identity. The piece of the mirror he takes into his hands echoes Lesser's searching through garbage for pieces of Willie's manuscript. The Jewish Self in *The Tenants* thus incorporates not only the Western cultural tradition but also, through the contact with the Black Other, the African-American one.[33] Commodification of Black culture and identity plays a significant role in Malamud's

[33] Such an appropriation of the Other and its culture appears frequently in the works by Jewish-American authors, such as Saul Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King* (1959), or Philip Roth's *Goodbye, Columbus* (1959), to name at least two. For Bellow, the contact with the Black, African Other represents an opportunity to enrich the Self (the Self here is not specifically Jewish but it "defines one pole of Jewish American identity," that of White "in symbiotic contrast to blackness" (Goffman, 57)), to claim for itself the parts of the Other that would enable him to reinvent own identity. Roth's novella portrays the Jewish or rather White community as distancing itself, and thus negatively defining itself, from African Americans, yet simultaneously partaking and appropriating parts of Black culture for itself. Black culture is here objectified and commodified, as the description of Brenda, the protagonist's lover, and other ladies at the swimming pool illustrates. While they are portrayed as wearing Cuban heels and straw hats bought "from the cutest little *shvartze*" from their trip to Barbados, Brenda's simple elegance is depicted in contrast to them but still in terms of usurpation of Black culture; she is compared to "a sailor's dream of a Polynesian maiden." Budick, 144.

selected works. For Nat Lime, Buster and Ornita Harris, for instance, are in a way "a purchasable good,"[34] as he believes he can buy their affection. Similarly, Harry Lesser in *The Tenants* publishes, so to speak, the parts of Willie's anti-Semitic text he retrieves from the garbage in his [Malamud's] novel,[35] making it thus a part of his own cultural product. The Jewish Self in *The Tenants* can thus be said to be discursively constructed, negatively defined by the Other, and accorded an effect of identity by appropriating fragments of various cultural materials, including literary works from both Western and African-American tradition.

3.3 Constructing the Black Other

As the fundamental assumption concerning the idea of mutuality is that the influence is never unidirectional, it is important to consider how the construction of the Jewish Self involves in the construction of the Black Other. Similarly, as the Self needs the Other for continual reinvention of own identity, the Other engages in the very same process of identification and thus requires its constitutive outside. Both the Self and the Other participate in reciprocal construction, which "is not the ostensible intention of any of the interacting parties, but which is, nonetheless, the result of their attempting to define themselves through their resistance to each other."[36] Therefore, the anti-Semitic affronts, which were addressed in the previous subchapter as being constitutive of the Self, do not always stay without verbal reaction. In the closing scene of *The Tenants*, for example, the last uttered interaction between the two writers relies in the same way on insulting stereotypes: "Bloodsuckin Jew Niggerhater. Anti-Semitic Ape." (*The Tenants*, 229)

The mutual construction and the role of language in it can be best illustrated by the example of the game of dozens, "a game of nothing but naked words," (*The Tenants*, 131)

Philip Roth, *Goodbye, Columbus and Five Short Stories* (London: Penguin Books, 1986) 19.
[34] Goffman, 75.
[35] Sundquist, 432.
[36] Budick, 57.

which Harry is forced to play after he transgresses tacit boundaries and sleeps with a Black woman. What follows is a scene with complex set of meanings, in which Lesser and Willie compete in insulting each other, observed and cheered by the group of Willie's friends. Although initially reluctant to join, Lesser eventually gets involved: "I could call you filthy prick," to which Willie reacts:

> "Wasn't you plannin to say filthy nigger prick, without havin the courage to get it out? Tell the truth, man."
>
> "I'll tell the truth – I thought of it because I know you want to hear it."
>
> "Fine and okay," said Bill. "But now I'm gon call you a fartn shiteater faggot whore kike apeshit thievin Jew." (*The Tenants*, 134)

The game of "naked words" brings out both characters' latent racism. As Edward A. Abramson points out: "Each character is aware of what words will most hurt the other's racial or ethnic pride."[37] The scene reveals that both the Jewish and the Black writers are aware of the racial/ethnic identity of the Other, acknowledging thus simultaneously their own racial/ethnic Self and reaffirming the discourse of racial hierarchy. Moreover, the game exemplifies, although in an extreme way, that accusations and expressions of anti-Semitism and racism always require employing the language of anti-Semites and racists, which further strengthens the racially biased discourse. According Eric J. Sundquist, "[l]anguage itself in such cases easily becomes a hyperbolic weapon, lending itself to paranoia and tendentious construction, which in turn has made it a significant factor in the conflict between blacks and Jews."[38]

The Black Other can be said, similarly to the Jewish Self, to be performatively constructed in contact with its Jewish Other. Nevertheless, such a claim becomes problematic in relation to Malamud's fiction, as the action of the two short stories and the novel

[37] Edward A. Abramson, *Bernard Malamud Revisited* (New York: Twayne, 1993) 91.
[38] Eric J. Sundquist, *Strangers in the Land: Black, Jews, Post-Holocaust America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005) 8.

is described from predominantly Jewish perspective and filtered through Jewish consciousness. Thus, Nat Lime's perspective, the story's framing device in "Black Is My Favorite Color," does not penetrate the mind of the Black Other; Blacks "remain external here, an exotic mystery, silenced, given to seemingly irrational behavior."[39] Although Charity Sweetness's silence can be interpreted as a deliberate, and, in a way, empowering decision,[40] African-American consciousness remains unexplored and it is rather an oblique satire of Jewish hypocrisy, "the naïve belief in Jewish righteousness and African-American gratefulness" that Malamud intends to unveil.[41]

Similarly, in *The Tenants*, the framing consciousness is that of Harry Lesser; it is again the Jewish eye that continues to be the perceiving one. According to Brita Lindberg-Seyersted, even the final recognition of the Other and an insight into his anguish is in fact made only from Lesser's perspective, as the reporting tag indicates[42]: "Each, *thought the writer*, feels the anguish of the other." (*The Tenants*, emphasis added) Although it can be argued that at this point in the novel, Harry's and Willie's selves are intertwined to such a degree that it is difficult to distinguish who *the* writer is, the fact nevertheless remains that it is the Jewish consciousness that is explored throughout the novel, and not the African-American one. The reader enters Spearmint's mind only through fragments of his writings, sporadic dialogues (presented and commented again from the point of the Jewish protagonist), and Lesser's, not Willie's, dreams and visions.

In "Angel Levine," the dependency of the Black Other on the narrating perspective and the Jewish Self is even more apparent, as the Black waits for the Jewish protagonist to literally give him substance by verbally acknowledging his identity. Levine's own consciousness remains irrelevant, it is only Manischevitz's mind that the reader awaits to be

[39] Goffman, 75.
[40] Newton, 123.
[41] Goffman, 76.
[42] Brita Lindberg-Seyersted, "A Reading of Bernard Malamud's *The Tenants*," *Journal of American Studies* 9.1 (April, 1975) 100-101, JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27553154> 3 Nov 2015.

enlightened and enriched. From his first appearance in the story, the incompleteness of Levine's Self is highlighted: "He seemed not to be sure of himself,"[43] and his self-identification implies his dependency on a confirmation made from the outside: "I am what I am granted to be, and at present the completion is in the future." (Angel Levine, 46) When Manischevitz finally acknowledges and pronounces, though still with hints of uncertainty, Levine's angelhood, "I think you are an angel from God," (Angel Levine, 55) Levine's Self is restored and his identity re-established, which is indicated by his changing to his old clothes and recovering his former appearance: "Levine went to men's room and returned in his old clothes."[44] (Angel Levine, 55) In Malamud's short story, Levine "becomes what Manischevitz says he is."[45]

Crucial for reading the way the Black Other is constructed in the story narrated from Jewish perspective are final paragraphs of "Angel Levine." Observing Levine's departure through "a small broken window" (a popular Malamudian image), Manischevitz is said to believe that "he saw a dark figure borne aloft on a pair of magnificent black wings." Together with the emblematic final sentence "Believe me, there are Jews everywhere," the story could be read as an affirmation of common humanity, as an acceptance of diversity or "magical brotherhood"[46] between Jewish and African Americans. Nevertheless, Malamud inserts between these two statements other sentences, which problematize such reading: "A feather drifted down. Manischevitz gasped as it turned white, but it was only snowing." (Angel Levine, 56) Although both characters require the other one and the story ends,

[43] Bernard Malamud, "Angel Levine," *The Magic Barrel* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1982) 45. All subsequent references to the short story will be cited in the text in the following manner: (Angel Levine, page number).

[44] Malamud's treatment of the relationship between the Jewish tailor and the black angel and the role of language in it parallels Philip Roth's claim about power of putting feelings into words in *Goodbye, Columbus*, "to phrase them was to invent them and own them." Roth, *Goodbye, Columbus* 22.

[45] Kellman

[46] Cynthia Ozick, "Literary Blacks and Jews," *Bernard Malamud: A Collection of Critical Essays,* ed. Leslie A. Field and Joyce W. Field (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1975) 81.

in a way, "on a positive note with both characters prospering,"[47] it is the encompassing whiteness of the snow that dominates at the end. Despite the antiracist and universalist message of the story, apparent especially in the discussion in a Harlem synagogue Manischevitz observes when looking for Levine, "the overriding signifier of universalism, of common humanity," Goffman comments, "is finally whiteness. […] The dominant cultural image-system, structured in Manichean white and black, proves unavoidable."[48]

What is the relationship between the ultimately encompassing Whiteness and Jewishness, remains a question. According to Evelyn Gross Avery, the dominating Whiteness equals Jewishness and the mutually prospering relationship is enabled only by suppressing African-American and accepting Jewish identity, which is, as Avery notes, "a poor prescription for Black-Jewish relations. The Negro is accepted only when he sheds his black identity and assumes a Jewish one. Jewishness dominates, submerging blackness."[49] Goffman's interpretation does not rely on Avery's Black-Jewish binarism, it introduces the Jew "as a third term, one of transition and transcendence signifying a common humanity," in the Black-White paradigm. In Goffman's view, the Whiteness supported by the final statement of the story represents "the homogenizing terrain in which Black and Jewish relations occur."[50] Both analyses, despite their distinct treatment of Whiteness, nevertheless share the view of Whiteness as overpowering and smothering Blackness. Indeed, looking again at the conclusion of "Angel Levine," it is only after Levine's departure when the meaning of his identity and of his presence in the characters' lives is uttered and described, and thus ascribed to him. It is the White/Jewish narrator who speaks and interprets, while the Black Other is silent or even absent.

[47] Evelyn Gross Avery, *Rebels and Victims: The Fiction of Richard Wright and Bernard Malamud* (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1979) 101.
[48] Goffman, 71.
[49] Avery, 101.
[50] Goffman, 12.

The Black remains silent and awaits signification, while the Jewish speaks for and about him.[51] It is ultimately the perceiving Jewish Self rather than the Black Other who is renegotiated and restored in the short story. "As is usual in contacts with the Other," Goffman observes, "the perceiving culture is ultimately enriched in its ability to draw upon a new landscape of images, while the perceived culture is flattened, distorted, and decontextualized, becoming an instrument for the imagination of the perceiving eye."[52]

3.4 Lesser and Spearmint: Mutuality in Extreme

"Who's hiring Willie Spearmint to be my dybbuk?" (*The Tenants,* 163) Harry Lesser desperately asks when faced with a difficult decision: to tell Spearmint that his manuscript is on the right track and thus allow him to rest and go to Irene, with whom Lesser is in love, or to recommend further work on the book, thus, shattering Willie's already undermined self-confidence. The reference to Jewish mythology is here of crucial importance. It not only indicates Lesser's coming to terms with his Jewish identity, but it also associates the novel with the motif of the Double. The word "dybbuk" is, as Sundquist explains, "Hebrew for "one who cleaves," in Kabbalah, a usually malignant transmigrating soul that has been unable to fulfil its function in one lifetime and inhabits a person left vulnerable by sin, taking over their personality; in some cases, speaking curses and blasphemy from their mouth. In one interpretation, the dybbuk represents the suppressed bitterness and resentment of Jews at having been condemned by God to centuries of suffering and exile."[53] Both interpretations of Sundquist's explanation suggest a link with the Double motif – the Self is split but both

[51] Dynamics familiar to readers of such novels as Richard Wright's *Native Son*, where the Jewish lawyer Max attempts to explain Bigger Thomas's life and motifs for his crimes while the Black himself stays mute, exemplifying the elemental misunderstanding of the emotional level between the two characters, or Saul Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, in which the African-American pickpocket figures as a symbol which awaits to be ascribed meaning by the Jewish Self, similarly as in *Henderson the Rain King*, where the final scene presents an image of encompassing whiteness in the form of snow, just as in Malamud's "Angel Levine."
[52] Goffman, 69.
[53] Sundquist, 389-390.

parts are still locked in the relationship of mutuality, the Self encounters the suppressed part of identity embodied in the Other. The Self is thus incomplete, attempting wholeness in contact with its Double.

Considering the relationship between Harry Lesser and Willie Spearmint in *The Tenants*, the concept of the Double and its frequent affiliation with mirror images in the novel have become one of relatively frequent themes observed and analyzed by Malamudian critics. To name a few, Edmund Spevack, for example, states in his analysis of the novel that the "theme of the mirror […] is fitting: Harry believes he is sure of his own mature and defined identity, but his being is not complete without his less developed alter ego, Willie."[54] Similarly, Edward Abramson reads the writers' relationship as the Self encountering the image of itself in the Double: "Willie and Harry frequently see aspects of themselves in each other."[55] For Sundquist, Lesser's reflection at the beginning of the novel prefigures the characters' mutuality: "Although the book begins in solipsism […] the mirror images that proliferate in the novel continually drive the black and the Jew into a bond at once sympathetic and destructive."[56] Sheldon J. Hershinow's title of his analysis, "Mankind's Divided Self: *The Tenants*," implies that his reading of the novel is going to build on the idea of the Double as well. According to Hershinow, the conflict between the Jewish and the African-American writer "symbolizes humankind's divided self," apparent in Harry's "humanitarian instincts" competing his "self-center absorption in writing," or in Willie's "desire to be involved and his conviction that an aesthetic sense demands an alienated dedication." In this sense, Hershinow argues, "Harry and Willie are mirror images of each

[54] Edmund Spevack, "Racial Conflict and Multiculturalism: Bernard Malamud's *The Tenants*," *MELUS* 22.3 (Autumn, 1997) 35. JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/467653> 14 May 2015.
[55] Abramson, 92.
[56] Sundquist, 382.

other. […] As mirror images of each other, the two writers need one another, repel each other, and suffer together."[57]

Moreover, many critics have also observed a certain level of irony in Malamud's treatment of the characters' mutuality and the Double motif, especially in the final scene of mutual destruction: "Lesser felt his jagged ax sink through bone and brain as the groaning black's razor-sharp saber, in a single boiling stabbing slash, cut the white's balls from the rest of him." (*The Tenants*, 230) Sundquist, for instance, reads the fatal encounter as Malamud's going against stereotypical classification, highlighting thus its artifice: "Malamud's climactic violence is a parodic inversion of Frantz Fanon's well-known psychiatric judgment that in the discourse of racism the Black, associated with "biological danger," is attacked with castration, […] whereas the Jew, associated with "intellectual danger," is attacked in his religious or historical identity by being sterilized or killed."[58] Another level of irony may be seen in the fact that such a parodic inversion reinvents rather than subverts the discourse of racism, which Sundquist seems to miss. The interpretation of the final confrontation interests also John Alexander Allen and Edward A. Abramson, who point at the exchange of Selves inherent in the destruction: "Accurately aiming blows at each other, they carry out what must be recognized as an exchange of roles,"[59]Allen writes in his "The Promised End: Bernard Malamud's *The Tenants*." Similarly, for Abramson, each writer takes on "each other's persona" and becomes "the other's victim."[60]

Elaborating on the concept of the Double and on Allen's and Abramson's, as well as Sundquist's, statements, the reversal of Lesser's and Spearmint's Selves can be read

[57] Sheldon J. Hershinow, *Bernard Malamud* (New York: F. Ungar, 1980) 93.
[58] Sundquist, 382.
[59]John Alexander Allen, "The Promised End: Bernard Malamud's *The Tenants*," *Bernard Malamud: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Leslie A. Field and Joyce W. Field (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1975) 105.
[60] Abramson, 92.

in a highly ironic light. From their first verbal exchange, Malamud suggests a common link between Lesser and Spearmint:

> "Man, he [Willie] complained, "can't you see me writing on my book?"
>
> Harry apologetically admitted he had. "I'm a writer myself." (*The Tenants,* 29)

The common link introducing their mutuality also proposes the reading of their relationship through the concept of the Double. Taking account of the Jewish perspective dominant in the novel, it is especially Lesser whose repressed, downplayed parts of the Self are exposed in the narration, such as in the passage depicting Lesser's imagining a wintry day, outside, early in the novel: "[G]lad of its existence but without desire to be in or of it, breathe its stinging glow into his half-retired lungs, live it. This sort of pull and push he had long ago quelled in the self else he would never have seriously written." (*The Tenants,* 15) The incompleteness of Lesser's Self is further expressed in the form of comparison with its Double: Lesser's slow writing pace is contrasted with Spearmint's intensive and productive four-hour workdays, Lesser's joyless submersion into the process of writing and rewriting at the expense of a full life with Spearmint's friends, parties and pleasure received both from writing and from relationships, Lesser's constant thinking about his manuscript (even in his dreams) with Spearmint's ability to shake off easily his writing self and to live his life.

In the course of the novel, the dynamics change to the point of reversing the above mentioned comparisons. It is Spearmint and not Lesser who tears away from social life, concentrates solely on writing and becomes a slower writer constantly rewriting his manuscript, while Lesser develops an intimate relationship with his girlfriend and is rarely present in his apartment. "You young bloods have got it all over us alter cockers," (*The Tenants*, 156) says Spearmint, echoing unconsciously Lesser's earlier sense of loss over unlived life. Unlike Spearmint, Lesser is aware of the situation and he reflects on the role reversal: "The writer felt especially bad to be sleeping with his girl – to be in love with her –

and keeping it from him whose present pain he so well understood." (*The Tenants*, 152) The exchange of positions is apparent also in respect to Irene, Spearmint's, and later, Lesser's Jewish girlfriend. Similarly to Willie before him, Lesser begins to neglect Irene for his book, takes money from her and finally moves back to the dilapidated tenement to imprison him in isolation.

The irony in the development from possible wholeness of Selves derived from the mutually beneficent relationship (Spearmint provides the possibility of an authentic, full life for Lesser, who in turn offers an artistic experience for the beginning writer) lies exactly in the fact that the writers reverse their Selves, instead of completing them in their encounter with the Double. The expectations of enrichment by and through the Other, raised by incorporating mirror images and numerous reflections throughout the novel, remain unfulfilled; the Self stays incomplete by repressing previously dominant parts and elevating formerly unfulfilled parts of identity. The Self in fact becomes the Double, thus requiring a Double again, even though the Double is the former Self.

The reading of the novel with the aid of the Double motif is reinforced, apart from the allusion to Jewish mythology, by literary references that Malamud incorporates into the narration. The reference to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*: "Levenspiel, resembling mysterious stranger if not heart of darkness" (*The Tenants,* 23), for example, suggest Marlow and his Double Mr. Kurtz. Modified version of William Blake's "The Tiger" draws the attention to the unspoken, yet implied, "fearful symmetry" of Willie's and Lesser's Selves, intertwined with the racially and artistically biased tension between the two writers:

WILLIE

Nigger, nigger, never die

Shinin face and bulgin eye.

LESSER

Nigger, nigger, shining bright

In the forest of the night. (*The Tenants*, 51)

In *The Tenants*, Malamud thus seems to suggest, on the one hand, that the Jewish Self cannot be whole or near-to-whole without its Double. On the other hand, he problematizes such a premise by employing the concept of the Double in an ironic way, recalling the constructed and thus unstable and fluid nature of identities. Although the Self needs the Double for its construction, it cannot be fully completed by it; the productivity of mutuality is always limited. Malamud's *The Tenants* reveals[61] that the Black and Jewish "remain bound together as tightly, as fatally, as ever,"[62] dependent on each other in spite of limited possibilities of communication and mutual understanding.

[61] Similarly to the Black-Jewish relations in Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*, where Coleman Silk likewise becomes the Other (a decision that later backfires on him in a highly ironic incident).
[62] Sundquist, 522.

Chapter 4 – Literature and Society

4.1 Black-Jewish Alliance and Malamud's Fiction

Comparing "Angel Levine" and *The Tenants* in her "Literary Blacks and Jews," Cynthia Ozick asks: "How was the transmutation from magical brotherhood to ax-murder wrought? Is it merely that society has changed so much since the late 1950's, or is it that the author of 'Angel Levine' was, even then, obtuse?"[1] It is difficult not to challenge Ozick's reading with another pair of questions: Why is 'Black Is My Favorite Color' left out of her analysis of Black-Jewish relations in Malamud's fiction? And why is 'Angel Levine' seen as a rather uncomplicated tale of 'magical brotherhood' instead of a complex story already dealing with multiple ambiguities? Consequently, it is understandable to query, in reaction to Ethan Goffman's statement, how *clear* the progression from shared compassion to hatred in Malamud's fiction really is: "Taken together, the three [selected texts by Malamud] clearly react to contemporaneous developments in Black-Jewish relations, evolving from a hopeful vision of common humanity, to a final scene of hostility."[2]

While it is comprehensible why Ozick arrived at the proposition that to Manischevitz "and to Malamud at the end of the fifties" the fact that "Black and Jew are one is no miracle," considering, for example, the final sentence of the short story, it cannot be readily accepted. Apart from highly problematic and ambivalent nature of the story's end,[3] such a proposition overlooks Malamud's use of irony, apparent, for instance, in the reversal of Black and Jewish roles. Thus, when Manischevitz, the archetypal Job figure, asks God for assistance or for a sign and a Black man appears in his apartment, the tailor's first explanation is that he is "being visited by a case worker from the Welfare Department – some came at night –

[1] Cynthia Ozick, "Literary Blacks and Jews," *Bernard Malamud: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Leslie A. Field and Joyce W. Field (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1975) 81.
[2] Ethan Goffman, *Imagining Each Other: Blacks and Jews in Contemporary American Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000) 68.
[3] See chapter 3.3.

for he had recently applied for relief."[4] In his "historicized interpretation" of the story, Ethan Goffman calls attention to Malamud's subverting common expectations implicit in Manischevitz and Levine's first encounter: "[A] Black intervening on a Jew's behalf subverts expectation (at least in an American setting)," reversing, and thus simultaneously reinventing, "the stereotype of Jewish welfare bureaucrat and Black recipient."[5] This ironic reversal of conventional roles indicates the discrepancy between the ideal of Black-Jewish brotherhood suggested in the universalist lesson Manischevitz learns during his wanderings in Harlem and mutual prejudices and antagonism, to which he, similarly to Ozick, seems to pay no attention.

When entering a Harlem bar in which Levine spends his time, Manischevitz hears insults such as "Beat it, pale puss," or "Exit, Yankel, Semitic trash" and he must fight his way through a hostile crowd like Moses on the run from Pharaoh parting the Red Sea: "But he moved towards the table where Levine sat, the crowd breaking before him as he hobbled forward." (Angel Levine, 54) According to Goffman, the "angry voices clamoring at the end of the Black-Jewish alliance are already represented." Moreover, Goffman notes that "psychic healing that occurs on the social and historical level," suggested by the story's final affirmation of common humanity, "is at best incomplete. The Black section of town remains separate from a dominant society that demarcates a repressed zone against which to define

[4] Bernard Malamud, "Angel Levine," *The Magic Barrel* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1982) 45. All subsequent references to the short story will be cited in the text in the following manner: (Angel Levine, page number).

[5] Goffman, 69.

That such a stereotype, as Goffman calls it, was deeply rooted in the discourse of Black-Jewish relations can be illustrated also by its recurrence in works by other American-Jewish authors. For instance, Saul Bellow in his short story "Looking for Mr. Green" (1968) employs the Jewish bureaucrat-Black recipient dynamics, depicting the protagonist's effort to deliver a relief check to Mr. Green in the Negro neighborhood. Philip Roth in *Portnoy's Complaint* in a way also recalls, though ironically, the expected model in the character of Alexander Portnoy's father, who sells insurance to the inhabitants of impoverished neighborhoods, believing passionately in his mission: "He wasn't just saving his own soul […] no, it was also to save some poor son of a bitch on the brink of letting his insurance policy lapse, and thus endangering his family's security 'in the event of a rainy day.'" Philip Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1990) 5.

itself."[6] Combined with the concluding scene of the short story, in which it is Whiteness that dominates, "Angel Levine" cannot be read merely as an unproblematic illustration of cooperation between Blacks and Jews. The voices undermining the existence of the alliance may already be present, or, alternatively, they may have always been there, from the first contact between Jews and Blacks in America.

The transmutation of Black-Jewish relations from "Angel Levine" to *The Tenants* is not as vast as one might think after reading Ozick's essay. No doubt the tone of "Angel Levine" is more optimistic than the 1971 novel but the racist affront "Semitic trash" in the short story does not differ fundamentally from Willie's insult "Bloodsuckin Jew Niggerhater" in *The Tenants*. Especially when taking into consideration the intermediary short story, "Black Is My Favorite Color," the difference between the earlier story and the novel is not that surprising.

Malamud wrote "Black Is My Favorite Color" in 1963, the year, Paul Witcover observes in his critical essay, that Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his famous 'I Have a Dream' speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. "But while King spoke hopefully of a future of racial harmony in which men and women would be judged not by the color of their skins but on the content of their character," Witcover remarks, "Malamud was sounding a far more pessimistic note."[7] Iska Alter in "The Broader Canvas: Malamud, the Blacks, and the Jews" makes similar juxtaposition, likewise noting the story's pessimism: "Given this atmosphere [King's speech and optimistic reactions it generated], the pessimism of 'Black Is My Favorite Color' strikes with the uncommon force of prophecy."[8] The word

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[6] Goffman, 70.

[7] Paul Witcover, "Critical Essay on 'Black Is My Favorite Color'," *Short Stories for Students*, ed. David M. Galens, vol. 16 (Detroit: Gale, 2002) Literature Resource Center<http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CH1420043711&v=2.1&u=karlova&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w&asid=58590047075d9857f5b7406c7b869542> 19 May 2015.

[8] Iska Alter, "The Broader Canvas: Malamud, the Blacks, and the Jews," *The Good Man Dilemma: Social Criticism in the Fiction of Bernard Malamud* (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1981) Literature Resource Center

'prophecy' in Alter's statement is important, considering the name of the story's protagonist – Nat Lime, a link that Alter herself oddly misses. According to Witcover, most names in the short story have allegorical significance; the name of the protagonist for instance alludes, besides to Hawthorne, to the Old Testament prophet Nathan. "As with many of the Old Testament prophets," Witcover writes, Nat's message – to which he himself, ironically, is deaf – is as tart and sour as a lime." For Witcover, the allegorical implications of the characters' names imply that the story is not "quintessential realism", as Alter argues in her analysis, but "a hybrid fiction containing both real and fantastic elements."[9] Although Witcover is certainly right about fantastic features in the narration, it is useful to point out that Alter's statement was made in contrast to "Angel Levine." In Alter's view, the idealism of possible racial harmony dominates only the surface of the earlier short story, while a closer look reveals "underlying pressures" of which the latter is "an overt extension." So, while "Angel Levine" is a fantasy "whose very form accentuates the implausible but humane conclusion,"[10] "Black Is My Favorite Color" is narrated in much more realistic manner, though calling its realism 'quintessential' is at least problematic.

Questioning the form and narrative perspective is crucial with regard to Malamud's 1963 short story. Without a critical view of the narrator's reliability and rhetoric, the story could be read as Jewish sympathy violently and inexplicably rejected by African Americans. Looking closely at who the narrator is and what it is that he chooses to narrate reveal his naivety and ignorance to what is actually happening around him. In "Black Is My Favorite Color", Malamud forsook his most commonly used third-person omniscient point of view[11] and employed a first-person narrator who, significantly, often contradicts himself. In the second paragraph, for example, he claims that for him "there's only one human color and

<http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CH1420043712&v=2.1&u=karlova&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w&asid=f7bbfee7cb881f64ffb1b1134287ea3d> 8 Dec. 2015.

[9] Witcover

[10] Alter

[11] Edward A. Abramson, *Bernard Malamud Revisited* (New York: Twayne, 1993) 143-144.

that's the color of blood" and then asks "Who wants everybody to be the same?" and further asserts that he has got "an eye for color" and is "drawn" to Blacks. (Favorite Color, 22) His insistence on black being his favorite color thus further emphasizes "the ironic discrepancy between desire and reality"[12] that is hinted already in the story's title. From the beginning of the tale, Malamud thus provides readers with the clue for spotting incongruities in Nat Lime's narration. "Nat Lime deserves whatever skepticism readers want to give him, or whatever sympathy they prefer to withhold. No doubt, in that light, the story 'reads out' its own critique,"[13] as Adam Z. Newton writes.

Similarly, as in the earlier story about a suffering tailor and a Black angel, Malamud uses irony and ironic reversal of roles to undermine a simplistic, surface reading of "Black Is My Favorite Color." Not only is Nat Lime depicted as an unreliable narrator but he completely fails to understand the significance of his superior social and economic status, placing him into the position of exploiter, not victim. "The story reverses," Goffman argues, "expected Black and Jewish roles, satirizing the possibility of Jewish oppression, of a continued role as subversive fool, in a context of American privilege." What was touched upon in "Angel Levine" is here expanded: "In America the real victims are Blacks: social context reverses the time-honored paradigm of Jews as outsider,"[14] a fact that Nat Lime appears to be unaware of. His "daily growing bald spot" (Favorite Color, 21) is nothing in comparison to his "even larger blind spot", as Witcover wittily remarks.[15]

To what extent he is really blind to the significance of his status and to what extent he suppresses the guilt and compensates for the inherent exploitative situation by ostensibly charitable gestures, such as buying his childhood "friend," Buster, candies or taking him to movies, remains a question. It is nevertheless clear that he does not fully understand his

[12] Alter
[13] Adam Zachary Newton, *Facing Black and Jew: Literature as Public Space in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge, UK; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 125.
[14] Goffman, 72.
[15] Witcover

role as a Jew in Harlem and as a White in America. His occupation, a liquor store owner in Harlem, for instance "fulfills the stereotype of the profiteering Jew who benefits from despair and addiction caused by the society within whose rules he profits."[16] When Nat is looking back on his relationship with Buster, he recalls also Buster's father, "a barber but too drunk to stay a barber," which is probably why his family had to live in one of the houses that according to Nat looked "like they had been born and died there, dead not long after the beginning of the world," (Favorite Color, 22-23) with furniture, the best of which "was falling apart in pieces." (Favorite Color, 25) This memory does not prevent Nat from feeding the problem of alcoholism in Harlem, especially by offering discount to African Americans, failing to notice the irony in what he sees as a charitable gesture. The discrepancy between his intention and actual effect is unintentionally confirmed by Nat himself, when he describes Ornita Harris, who later becomes his lover, repeatedly buying alcohol in Nat's shop: "Sometimes she didn't feel like talking, she paid for the bottle, less discount, and walked out. Her eyes were tired and she didn't look to me like a happy woman." (Favorite Color, 27) What Nat considers an act of kindness in fact supports Ornita's desperate situation.

Nat's affair with Ornita Harris further exemplifies fundamental differences between him and the Black community. While Nat can, as Ryan D. Poquette observes, easily pay for a couple of weeks in the hospital and not care much about his shop having been robbed because he was insured or can rent an extra furnished room when he wants a private place for him and Ornita to share on their dates, Ornita cannot afford such luxuries.[17] Instead of her own apartment, she has to live with her brother's family, probably unable to pay the rent after her husband's death. Despite such differences, Ornita reluctantly agrees to marry Nat, a prospect that appears possible only so long as they stay in a neutral or isolated territory,

[16] Goffman, 71.
[17] Ryan D. Poquette, "Critical Essay on 'Black Is My Favorite Color'," *Short Stories for Students*, ed. David M. Galens, vol. 16 (Detroit: Gale, 2002) Literature Resource Center <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CH1420043710&v=2.1&u=karlova&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w&asid=7cbac6557c1740d9b3befa0050f57062> 19 May 2015.

such as apartments, with carefully selected friends, or the Village ("Where do you go out with a Negro woman?"), where nobody "was surprised they saw us, nobody looked at us like we were against the law." (Favorite Color, 27) When entering a Black neighborhood, they are resolutely reminded of the impossibility of such a union. As Alter writes: "In this atmosphere, shaped by overt hostility, unspoken anger, and unconscious ambivalence, the reassuring notion that love can solve all problems seems unworkable."[18] According to Malamud in 1963, the ostensible liberalism of many Jews in America, sharing the optimism of Martin Luther King, Jr., is rather short-sighted in ignoring social and economic differences. Blacks and Jews cannot be one; the ideological assumptions of Black-Jewish alliance based on common experience do not stand up to reality of Jewish prosperity and Black persisting inequality in America. "Black remains separate from White, servant from master, a social and economic relationship that Lime cannot overcome and never quite understands," Goffman writes in his analysis of the story.

Ambivalence, and certain level of pessimism, integral to Black-Jewish relations suggested in "Angel Levine" and elaborated in "Black Is My Favorite Color" culminate in *The Tenants*. To regard Malamud's 1971 novel merely as a text enacting violent dissolution of the alliance and a Jewish encounter with Black radicalism would nevertheless deprive it of its complexity. According to Goffman, "the relationship between Spearmint and Lesser replays in microcosm the Jewish role of patron and the Black rebellion," suggesting further that Willie is not a static totem created by Black nationalism as Ozick claims in her essay[19] but "a paradigmatic stretch of African American literary history, from Black naturalism

[18] Alter

[19] According to Ozick, Willie, in his statement "My form is *myself*," freezes himself into the image of a totem, "a political position taken at its most absolute. For a totem is an absolute politics: an object, an artifact, a *form* representing an entire people […] The totem has no fluidity, its being is its meaning. Willie has turned the politics of a group into an object – himself, *black man*. In Willie Art is Politics, Politics is Art." Ozick, 93.

to Black Arts, from Richard Wright to Amiri Baraka."[20] In this respect, the novel is not a fictional record of the breaking point in Black-Jewish coalition but rather contemplation on the development of mutual relations.

Crucially, given the fact that the 'Jewish patron' and the 'black rebel' in the novel are both writers and their encounters are intertwined with discussions over purpose and proper form of literary representation, the focus returns to the role of literature in mutual renegotiation of identities and of social, political and cultural status in America. "In fact," Edmund Spevack writers, "the creation of literary texts, as well their critical reception and political role in society, have themselves become highly sensitive areas contributing to ethnic and racial conflict. Literature has thus been turned into a battleground on which political and social issues are contested."[21] If "the literary conflict between the two writers is carried out primarily in racial terms,"[22] as Spevack notes about Willie Spearmint and Harry Lesser, then the racial and social tension is, in reverse, carried out in literary terms in the novel.

4.2 Patron and Rebel

The first encounter between Lesser and Spearmint in *The Tenants* places both characters in the sphere of literature. Almost haunted by the idea of an unknown typist somewhere in the house, Lesser traces the sound of a typewriter to an empty apartment, in which he sees "a black man at a wooden kitchen table, typing."[23] The, already quoted, first verbal exchange between the two characters further grounds their mutuality in literary terrain. Notably, it is not the first time that Malamud presents the initial meeting between African-American and Jewish characters in terms of literature. In "Angel Levine," the angel

[20] Goffman, 114.
[21] Edmund Spevack, "Racial Conflict and Multiculturalism: Bernard Malamud's *The Tenants*," *MELUS* 22.3 (Autumn, 1997) 32. JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/467653> 14 May 2015.
[22] Spevack, 41.
[23] Bernard Malamud, *The Tenants* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971) 27.
All subsequent references to the novel are cited in the text in the following manner: (*The Tenants*, page number).

is introduced as reading newspaper, the same activity Manischevitz was doing before his appearance. Apart from establishing a relationship between the Self and its Double, such first confrontations point to the important role that literature and press played in mutual relations. Moreover, it shifts the Manischevitz-Levine and Harry-Willie tension from individual to collective, from private to public set of implications, confirming further Malamud's role in reiterating and reinventing the discourse of Black-Jewish relations in America.[24]

Even before the two actually meet for the first time, Lesser's feeling towards the unknown writer are already marked by ambivalence: "He felt, despite his familiarity with the sound, as though he were hearing it for the first time in his life, sensation not unmixed with competitive envy." (*The Tenants*, 26) Almost all subsequent encounters between the two writers are likewise mixed with mutual suspiciousness, echoing thus the ambiguity inherent in Black-Jewish relations suggested by Murray Friedman.[25] Thus, Lesser, for example, sees Spearmint during a party in his flat as "fellow writer, *maybe future* friend" (*The Tenants*, 43; emphasis added) and their closest moment – "They embraced like brothers" (*The Tenants*, 54) is already affected by an apocalyptic vision similar to the catastrophe in Malamud's later *God's Grace* which precedes the expression of sympathy: "I'm gon drop a atom bomb on the next white prick I see," (*The Tenants*, 51) Willie says when smoking "a strawberry-papered joint" with Harry. (*The Tenants*, 47)

Their artistic cooperation at the beginning of their relationship is likewise mingled with antagonism. Asking Lesser to read and comment on his manuscript the next day after the party, Spearmint may demonstrate certain trust and respect but the final image of the scene is not that of appreciation: "The black threw him a look of hatred as he left the room." (*The Tenants*, 57) It soon becomes clear that the only relationship which can develop from this arrangement – Lesser as the voice of authority providing a feedback on a less experienced

[24] See chapter 2.1.3.
[25] See chapter 2.2.1.

writer's work – is that of teacher and pupil. Lesser and Spearmint, in other words, are not on equal terms; neither on economic and social levels (Lesser is financially secure, he resides in the tenement legally, his rights are protected, while Willie takes money from his girlfriend and 'imprisons' himself illegally in the house out of necessity), nor on the level of art (Lesser feels entitled to judge Spearmint's manuscript according to his own aesthetic standards).

The ambiguous relationship between Harry and Willie epitomizes in many ways the evolution of the Jewish provider-Black recipient model. Lesser's patronage corresponds with Steven G. Kellman's statement about Malamud's tendency to place his Jewish characters in a stronger position than their African-American counterparts: "It is the benevolent patron's plea for equity. Like the Jewish liberals who founded the NAACP and attempted to guide the labor and civil rights movements, Malamud's Jews offer themselves as senior partners in an egalitarian utopia."[26] Not fully conscious of his superiority, the Jewish patron in *The Tenants* imagines common ties (the same tenement, artistic struggle demanding personal sacrifices and isolation), and is surprised when he hears the actual voice of the African American: "My God, what he's lived through. What can I say to a man who's suffered so much personal pain, so much injustice, who clearly finds in his writing his hope and salvation, who defines himself through it?" (*The Tenants*, 66) Lesser nevertheless immediately directs his realization into familiar, literary grounds, thus, reconfirming his position:

> The Life he writes, whatever he calls it, moves, pains, inspires, even though it's been written before, and better, by Richard Wright, Claude Brown, Malcolm X, and in his way, Eldridge Cleaver. Their self-discoveries have helped Willie's. Many black men

[26] Steven G. Kellman, "Tenants, Tenets, and Tensions: Bernard Malamud's Blacks and Jews," *American Literary Dimensions: Poems and Essays in Honor of Melvin J. Friedman,* ed. Ben Siegel and Jay L. Halio (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999) Literature Resource Center <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CH1420052566&v=2.1&u=karlova&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w&asid=2e91da235c2eb5373045a9ae63fb9ced> 19 May 2015.

> live the same appalling American adventure, but it takes a unique writer to tell it uniquely, as literature. (*The Tenants*, 66)

The passage is significant for several reasons. First, it reveals the patron's confidence in his knowledge of Black experience in America, which is, in his view, that of anguish and violence. Harry here in a way reminds of Irving Howe, whom Ralph Ellison criticized for such a simplifying perspective in their exchange. Second, Black experience is for the Jewish benefactor mediated through literature. Thus, Lesser likens Spearmint's autobiography, or what he assumes to be one, to works by other African-American authors, possibly Malamud's own sources for the character of the Black writer. The novel's form is, in this respect, telling, as Goffman aptly observes. Anchored in Jewish perspective, the narrative is "interrupted by the snatches of literary fragments purportedly from Spearmint's pen, Malamud's reforging of the only window on Black life available to many Jews. The novel quite literally enacts this perception."[27] Third, Lesser's later discovery that the expected autobiographical part of Spearmint's manuscript is, in fact, fiction while the short stories are drawn from his life exposes how unreliable and biased Lesser's assumptions are and how limited his proposed patronage is.

Moreover, the beginning of the passage also points to the way Willie's life is interwoven with his writing, which develops in the novel to Willie's radical statement "*I* am art. […] My form is *myself*" (*The Tenants*, 75) and later, after burning Lesser's manuscript and with it Lesser's self, to a message written with ashes stinking of "human flesh" on the wall: "REVOLUTION IS THE REAL ART. NONE OF THAT FROM SHIT. I AM RIGHT FORM." (*The Tenants*, 178) Taking into consideration Goffman's claim that Willie is not a static character and that he evolves from "practitioner of the protest novel to exemplar of the Black Arts movement,"[28] his stance toward the Jewish patron likewise progresses. Given the

[27] Goffman, 115.
[28] Goffman, 117.

interconnection between art and life and literary fragments being the only "window" into Black experience available to Lesser, such a development from possible, yet, problematic, cooperation to radical refusal of Jewish help is apparent when Spearmint's manuscripts, or at least their fragments accessible to Lesser, are juxtaposed and analyzed.

The first of Willie's manuscripts, the one in which Harry unconsciously confuses the genres, has three different titles proposed by its author: *A Nigger Ain't Shit, Missing Life,* and *Black Writer?*, (*The Tenants*, 59) which Edmund Spevack understands as Willie's "insecurity concerning the role of the writer, as well as the exact definition of his motivation to produce literature."[29] It is at this moment of uncertainty when the Black draws inspiration from various sources, both black and white, and when he depends on Harry's assistance, even though he despises it. It is also at this moment when Black-Jewish relations are the strongest and both writers are able to embrace like brothers despite their growing antagonism. According to Sundquist, Malamud in the early relationship between Lesser and Spearmint, "creates a stylistic equivalent of the psychology of colonialism, whereby the colonized, internalizing the habits of the colonizer," tries to resemble him "to the point of disappearing in him."[30] Even in his first manuscript, Spearmint seeks to partially subvert these dynamics by taking the internalization of the White society's habits to its extreme, resembling parody – attempted cannibalism.[31]

In one of the stories, allegedly inspired by Willie's real life experiences, entitled "No Heart", an unnamed Black man feels the urge to taste a piece of a White's heart. After he kills

[29] Spevack, 36.
[30] Eric J. Sundquist, *Strangers in the Land: Black, Jews, Post-Holocaust America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005) 406.
[31] With regard to cannibalism as being the result of an assimilationist impulse of the colonized to absorb the values of the colonizer, a parallel with one of the novel's literary influences - Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and with Malamud's last published novel *God's Grace* proves relevant. While Crusoe's teachings convert Friday from his cannibal practice (Malamud ironically reverses this causality in *The Tenants*), Cohn's teaching efforts fail in this respect and the monkeys revert to cannibalism. "[I]t is arguable that both processes are the result of the White Man's educational project," Abramson quotes Claude Rawson's 1982 review *God's Grace*, which again calls the attention to the teacher-pupil relationship Lesser and Spearmint develop at the beginning of their ambivalent cooperation. Qtd. in Abramson, 124.

a White man and cuts into his body, he "can't find the heart. He cuts into his stomach, bowel, and scrotum, and is still cutting when the story ends." (*The Tenants,* 65) Images of cannibalism continue to appear in Willie's writing, as well as in Harry's dreams. After his first time having sex with Irene, Willie's Jewish girlfriend, Lesser dreams about a poem in which he sees Spearmint "gnawin this white bone", human bone, "Kosher meat, wanna bite?" (*The Tenants,* 145) In "Goldberg exits Harlem," one of the tales Willie threw out and Harry pulled out from the garbage, a Jew slumlord is stabbed to death by three old men and a Jamaican woman, who then dismiss the idea to "cut a piece off of him and taste what it taste like" because he "tastes Jewtaste, that don't taste like nothing good." (*The Tenants,* 203) In both Willie's pieces, Blacks try or think about consuming "the dead corpse of White society," Goffman writes, "to symbolically incorporate the power of that society into themselves,"[32] an act that is carried out only in Harry's dream.

There is a certain shift apparent in Spearmint's first and second tale. While in the first, consummation is attempted but fails, in the later story it is only suggested but immediately spurned because of the body's "Jewtaste." Willie's first manuscript can thus be said to represent a reaction to integrationist attitude to Blacks' situation in America. In Goffman's words, "the heart is lost among the mass of organs, implying a dormant structure, a White society lacking heart, not worth consuming or imitating despite the morbid assimilationist compulsion to do so."[33] In the later manuscript, White is transformed to Jew; it is no longer the corpse of White society but a Jewish patron whom the Blacks in Spearmint's fiction target. Willie's evolution thus entails a development from rejecting assimilation, through realizing and practicing hatred for White society, to transferring the enmity onto the Jewish object.

[32] Goffman, 118.
[33] Goffman, 118.

For Spearmint, Jews in the final stage of the proposed evolution absorbed the oppressive characteristics of White society, which makes their bodies in Willie's fiction repulsive and untouchable. "In incorporating characteristics of their oppressors," Goffman explains, "Jews betray their own history – and their commitment to civil rights – becoming an intensified symbol of dominant social hypocrisy."[34] Hence pieces of Willie's last manuscript are about pogroms in America, as is clear from their titles alone: "Goldberg's Last Days" also called "The Goldberg Blues" and "The First Pogrom in the U.S. of A.," and hence Willie can no longer accept Harry's patronage and violently rebels against it. "It isn't that I hate Jews. But […] [t]he way to black freedom is against them," Spearmint writes in a note on the last page of his final tale, explaining his anti-Semitism to potential readers – Lesser and the readers of *The Tenants*.

In reading Malamud's 1971 novel as the development of the Jewish patron-Black recipient/rebel model from its ambivalent beginnings through fierce antagonism, crucial questions still remain unanswered – how will the relationship between Blacks and Jews in America continue? Is Lesser and Spearmint's mutual destruction the final word on the alliance?

The novel's multiplicity of endings and undistinguishable blend of reality and fantasy deny the possibility of a straightforward answer. The fatal encounter between the two writers cannot be said to stand for the final and the real-among-imagined ending of the novel, as many critics would be ready to argue.[35] When asked in 1973 about his opinion on the

[34] Goffman, 118.

[35] According to Budick, for instance, the violent ending that for Ozick represents the purpose of the book, is not only just a penultimate ending (final words belong to Levenspiel) but also possibly just a fantasy ending, similarly as the imagined two Jewish and African-American marriages in an African village. (Budick, 11-12.) Sheldon J. Hershinow and Edward A. Abramson likewise stress Levenspiel's plea for mercy being the concluding image of *The Tenants.* Commenting on the three major endings in the final 24 pages (omitting thus the conflagration at the relative beginning of the book), Abramson claims: "Since the first ending [double marriage in Africa] is unlikely, the only way to avoid the second [killing each other] may be through Levenspiel's plea that black and white have mercy for each other as struggling fellow beings." (Abramson, 100.) Brita Lindberg-Seyersted's and John Alexander Allen's analyses of the novel

development of Black-Jewish relations in America, Malamud said: "It's impossible to predict – it may go one way; it may go another."[36] A year later, he replied to whether he would anticipate the future of Blacks and Jews in the US with another question: "How can one?"[37] *The Tenants* reflects this uncertainty. As a parable of ambivalence and unpredictability written "within an unresolved historical moment," the novel, Goffman comments, "dramatizes its own lack of closure by including three contradictory endings. This postmodern trope is not just a metafictional aesthetic experiment within a bounded text, but is generated by the larger 'text' of contemporaneous events."[38] Just as inconclusive relationship between Harry Lesser and Willie Spearmint mirrors Malamud's own indecision, "so society – the author behind the author – plays a critical part in constructing *The Tenants*, a work that not surprisingly mirrors unresolved social contradictions."[39]

4.3 Tenants in the House of Literature

The literary aspect of the relationship between Spearmint and Lesser functions in the novel not only as an illustration of changing dynamics between Blacks and Jews on the level of social reality; it introduces a conflict of its own - "the conflict between universalism and particularism, assimilation and neo-ethnicity, aestheticism and polemic,"[40] between different views on the 'right' form of literary representation and on cultural authority. Cynthia Ozick's parallel between Spearmint-Lesser and Ellison-Howe is thus fitting – all four are literary men,

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tally with Budick's observation of the imagined nature of Willie and Harry's fatal encounter, seeing it as "an equally fantastic passage" as the preceding double wedding.
John Alexander Allen, "The Promised End: Bernard Malamud's *The Tenants*," *Bernard Malamud: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Leslie A. Field and Joyce W. Field (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1975) 107.

[36] Leslie and Joyce Field, "An Interview with Bernard Malamud," *Bernard Malamud: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1975) 13.

[37] Alan Cheuse and Nicholas Delhanco, eds. *Talking Horse: Bernard Malamud on Life and Work* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) 22.

[38] Goffman, 122.

[39] Goffman, 122.

[40] Sundquist, 426.

their war is "a war of manhood (what does it mean to be human) and of art (what are a writer's most urgent sources)" and their clash leads to "no tangible conclusion."[41]

Malamud nevertheless does not faithfully follow the 1963-64 literary exchange and he reverses the Ellison and Howe roles, as Ozick herself notices in her emblematic essay: "There, however, it is the Jew who assumes Ellison's overall position of the free artist committed first of all to the clean fall of his language, and the black man who expresses Howe's implacability."[42] It is, thus, Spearmint who embodies, in an extreme way bordering on parody,[43] Howe's insistence on militant Black aesthetics and on Black particularism, while Lesser exemplifies Ellison's universalism and stresses Western cultural heritage. The reversal nonetheless is not complete, as Budick points out. In his indifference towards Jewish identity, Lesser resembles Howe and not Ellison in the debate; and Willie Spearmint is not "Ellison in this reversal of the reversal, but, rather, Wright and Baldwin, whom Ellison (in that exchange at least) rejects and Howe promotes."[44] The reason for this partial reversal, or blending of roles, may be seen in the novel's query about the meaning and role of the 'universal' in American cultural context. While Lesser's stance combines Ellison's emphasis on Western literary tradition and Howe's erasure of Jewishness by assimilation into White culture which then stands for the universal; Willie rejects the very notion of the universal, as it equates the nonracial and therefore White, subsuming and dissolving any possibility of ethnic or racial uniqueness. "Black ain't white and never can be. […] It ain't universal." (*The Tenants*, 74) For Willie, universalism does not amount to equality but to an implied hierarchy with Whites atop. That is why his advocacy of Black aesthetics must be that

[41] Ozick, "Literary Blacks and Jews" 85.
[42] Ozick, 86.
[43] Willie's extreme radicalism has been commented on by numerous critics. Sundquist claims that instead of coming closer to the universalist aesthetic embodied by Lesser, "Willie plunges into ultra-nationalist caricature," (Sundquist, 407) which Goffman explains as follows: "Spearmint's rhetorical exaggeration is close to satire, except that the Black Arts movement itself relied on excessive dramatization. This virtual self-parody is the rhetorical point; to Spearmint the truth of Black existence, the hatred Blacks have borne and now bare, is itself beyond parody: simply the survival of Blacks upon this continent, under these conditions, is an artistic statement." (Goffman, 117)
[44] Budick, 52.

of social protest, combining Howe's praise of Wright and Ellison's claim that even his reply to the Jewish critic "is in itself a small though necessary action in the Negro struggle for freedom."[45]

This tension over the true meaning of the universal and over the authority in American cultural discourse is present in *The Tenants* even before Lesser and Spearmint meet for the first time. It is important to realize that the first of multiple endings in the novel takes place before the Black writer is introduced. After one of his exchanges with Levenspiel approximately twenty pages into the novel, Lesser [or Malamud] imagines Levenspiel starting fire, after which the tenement burns down. "END OF NOVEL." (*The Tenants*, 23) It is in this moment when Levenspiel is described by references to Twain and Conrad, as a "mysterious stranger if not heart of darkness" and Malamud precedes the scene with another reference: "It says in this book, 'I should not think of devoting less than twenty years to an Epic Poem' – Coleridge." (*The Tenants*, 23) Apart from these the novel, up to the first ending, alludes also to Defoe, Wordsworth, and Eliot, always in connection with the description of dilapidated tenement and its surroundings, by which, according to Sundquist, *The Tenants* presents "a tableau of Western culture in collapse."[46] If Lesser speaks for the universal, Western cultural tradition, then the image of the tenement, which is "a trope for fictional space itself, as in the 'house of fiction' that Henry James held forth as the embodiment of authorial craft,"[47] burning down radically challenges the view of this tradition being sustainable and productive. In the words of Ethan Goffman: "The House of Art, with its Old World civilization, its complex networks of rooms, of structure and façade, does not survive in the New World,"[48] which would also explain Lesser's writer's block.

[45] Ralph Ellison, "The World and the Jug," *Shadow and Act* (New York: Random House, 1964) 142.
[46] Sundquist, 386.
[47] Sundquist, 386.
[48] Goffman, 122.

For Lesser, the universal consumes ethnic differences, similarly to the fire consuming the house. Thus he does not see himself as Jewish prior to the contact with the Other and his *The Promised End* is rather a Christian and generally American text than a Jewish one.[49] In this respect, Lesser's inability to come up with an original ending may be seen as a consequence of his previous relative success as a writer (he had already published two novels: the first good, but failing to profit, the second, bad but bringing fortune to its author) and of assimilation into unifying universalist tradition and into America. In Budick's view, the novel "expresses the worry that the fertility and vitality of the American Jewish imagination may be doomed to sterility, not because blacks (as the final image of the book would seem to suggest) would violently castrate or murder either Jews or Jewish culture, but because the Jewish American achievement may have programmed itself for disappearance."[50] Lesser's and Howe's (and one may wonder whether even Malamud's) hyphenated identity thus creates a space in which the ethnic element of that identity disappears, a consequence to which Spearmint's (and Ellison's) rebukes call attention, resulting in Lesser's case in artistic barrenness.

Budick's comment on the sterility of Lesser's imagination and the image of the house as a trope for literary space resonate with James Baldwin's statement in *The Fire Next Time* (1963):

> What it comes to is that if we, who can scarcely be considered a white nation, persist in thinking of ourselves as one, we condemn ourselves, with the truly white nations, to sterility and decay, whereas if we would accept ourselves as *we are*, we might bring new life to the Western achievements, and transform them. The price of this transformation is the unconditional freedom of the Negro […] He is *the* key figure in the country, and the American future is precisely as bright or as dark as he is. And

[49] See chapter 3.2.
[50] Budick, 16.

> the Negro recognizes this, in a negative way. Hence the question: Do I really *want* to be integrated into a burning house?[51]

It is hard not to imagine that Malamud had precisely this Baldwin's passage in mind when writing *The Tenants*. Malamud's "burning house" in the novel is in flames because of Lesser's insistence on his ownership of the American (and Western) house of literature, ignoring completely that the tenement itself is already a composite of other, including African-American, voices; hence possibly the references to Baldwin, Bessie Smith, Richard Wright, Claude Brown, Malcolm X or Ralph Ellison. The universalist Western Tradition Lesser advocates may thus be only a fabrication, or "a dream – a grotesque and foolish dream," to quote Mark Twain's *Mysterious Stranger* to which Malamud refers in the novel.[52]

Spearmint's Black power aesthetics nevertheless goes beyond a demand for acknowledging Blacks' constitutive role in American culture, advocated by Baldwin in the imagined exchange with Cynthia Ozick.[53] In identifying himself and his racial identity as the real art – "You want to know what's really art? I am art. Willie Spearmint, *black man*" (*The Tenants*, 75) – Willie claims Western tradition for himself. Budick argues that Willie's words recall Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952): "I am what I am,"[54] in which Ellison, according to Budick, "inherits Emerson's own inheritance of Descartes and the Western philosophical tradition, not to mention the tetragrammaton and thus the religious tradition as well."[55] Given the influence of *Invisible Man* on Malamud's *The Tenants*, certain parallels between the two novels can be recognized,[56] supporting thus the view that Spearmint, like Ellison's

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[51] James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time, Collected Essays* (New York: Library of America, 1998) 340.
[52] Mark Twain, *The Mysterious Stranger* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1995) 121.
[53] See chapter 2.3.3.
[54] When pronouncing the self-affirmation out loud, the novel's protagonist alters its wording and employs a pun, indicating his acceptance of his Southern heritage while publicly eating yams in New York despite his initial refusal to do so: "'They're my birthmark,' I said. 'I yam what I am!'" Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989) 266.
[55] Budick, 54.
[56] Apart from Willie's self-identification, parallels can also be found, for example, in Willie's residing illegally in the tenement, analogous to invisible man's living "rent-free in a building rented strictly to whites" (5-6) or in Willie's poem "Manifest Destiny" reminding of the sermon "Blackness of Blackness"

protagonist, claims an Emersonian heritage and with that also the cultural and religious tradition in America. By Willie's self-affirmation Malamud thus introduces the concept of supersessionism[57] on both religious and cultural levels.

By claiming the universalist tradition for himself, Willie also steps out of the discourse based on comparability of art according to unified literary standards and promotes radical ethnic and racial particularism. His literary approach, and the approach of the Black Arts movement of the 1960s, Edmund Spevack observes, implements a multiculturalist strategy - his "literature is not that of assimilation, but in many ways of establishing difference, separatism, and cultural resistance."[58] According to Spevack, Malamud's 1971 novel in a way anticipates the multiculturalism and canon debates of the 1980s and 1990s. Similarly, as with the question of Black-Jewish relations, *The Tenants* does not offer any clear solution to tensions over universalism and particularism, over "Western-humanistic mainstream" and "minority discourse".[59]

At the beginning of the 1970s, Malamud seems to suggest that erasure of cultural diversity in the name of universalism does not lead to unity but rather to conflict and cultural misappropriations. As Budick writes in her analysis of the Howe-Ellison dispute about

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in the Prologue of *Invisible Man.* Malamud also possibly employs Ellison's trope of invisibility: "The world is full of invisible people stalking people they don't know" (*The Tenants*, 25) and Willie's briefcase in which he keeps his manuscript recalls the invisible man's briefcase standing for his constantly changing identity. Both Ellison and Malamud also refer to a number of American authors, such as Mark Twain and it is possible that the reference to *The Mysterious Stranger* also links *The Tenants* and Ellison's novel in questioning existence of certain concepts or identities: "Or again, you often doubt if you really exist. You wonder whether you aren't simply a phantom in other people's minds." Ellison, *Invisible Man* 4.

[57] See chapter 5.1.
In his "Ellison's *Invisible Man:* Emersonianism Revised," Kun Jong Lee provides a useful reading of Ellison's simultaneous criticism and appropriation of Emerson based on the realization that "Emersonianism, which claims to be a universal doctrine, is circumscribed by an inherently racist dimension." Ellison, according to Lee, deconstructs Emerson on his own terms: "in the narrative proper, where the protagonist reads Emerson literally, Ellison demonstrates that that his namesake's ideas do not work for an African American; then, in the narrator's ex post facto ruminations, he modifies, extends, and enriches those ideas." This strategy corresponds partially to Willie's supersessionist attitude to Lesser and to his treatment of art.
Kung Jong Lee, "Ellison's *Invisible Man:* Emersonianism Revised," *PMLA* 107.2 (Mar., 1992) 332, 336, JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/462644> 1 April 2016.

[58] Spevack, 33.

[59] Spevack, 42.

Howe's failure to make explicit his Jewishness, "Howe creates the cultural vacuum that has necessitated that America's Jews look elsewhere for their cultural materials, putting them into direct confrontation with blacks,"[60] which applies to Lesser-Spearmint relationship as well. Malamud does not promote Spearmint's radical aestheticism either and he sees it as limiting in terms of art and in terms of understanding Black experience, in which he echoes Ellison's critique of Howe. Thus, Lesser insists on the possibility of common experience and humanity based on imagination, similarly as Ellison insists on formative influence of literature: "But if the experience is about being human and moves me then you've made it my experience." (*The Tenants,* 75) Irregularities in style and form support the novel's metafictional uncertainty, especially in refusing the "ideal of a godlike author imposing form and meaning,"[61] even though the Jewish perspective seems to dominate. Instead of an unequivocal portrayal of Black-Jewish alliance at its final point or of ethnic particularism as the 'right' source of art, *The Tenants* remains in ambiguity, rather providing a space for discursive dialogue than solving questions arising from it.

[60] Budick, 52.
[61] Goffman, 115.

Chapter 5 - Sites of Contested Meanings

5.1 Strangers at Home

Considering the constructed and unstable nature of identities and concepts,[1] it is apparent that any term attempting to capture what it is that constitutes various categories, including the Self and the Other, as well as the Jew and the African American, is inevitably limited and inadequate. To illustrate the chronic definitional incompleteness of terms, Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* discusses the category of 'women', claiming that inability of terms to encompass all of the alternatives of group identity of 'women' in fact, "permits that category to serve as a permanently available site of contested meanings."[2] Concepts and words are therefore permanently in the process of becoming and their meanings are always unstable and provisional, "open to intervention and resignification."[3]

Given the role of power relations in this process,[4] it is not surprising that tension over certain words and concepts played a crucial role in the discourse of Black-Jewish relations. Both Jewish and African Americans attempted to renegotiate specific linguistic usages for themselves, ensuring thus their position in American social and cultural context, as well as construct their Selves in the discursive contest with the Other. One of the words that have become a "site of contested meanings" for both groups is undoubtedly the notion of the stranger, which, similarly to the concept of the 'universal', contributed to the majority-minority tension inherent in Black-Jewish encounters.

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[1] See chapter 2.1.1.

[2] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 21.

[3] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 45.
Not only are terms not complete but they never *should* be, as Butler emphasizes in *Bodies That Matter*: "This incompleteness will be the result of a specific set of social exclusions that return to haunt the claims of identity through negation; these exclusions need to be read and used in the reformulation and expansion of a democratizing reiteration of the term. That there can be no final or complete inclusivity is thus a function of the complexity and historicity of a social filed that can never be summarized by any given description, and that, for democratic reason, ought never to be." Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York; London: Routledge, 1993) 221.

[4] See chapter 2.1.2.

From slave spirituals to the leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr., the adaptation of the Old Testament history of Jews' discrimination, slavery, exodus and the metaphor of "strangers in the land" has become the core of Black-Jewish mutuality and the fundamental trope of similar circumstances of Jewish and African Americans in America. As Eric J. Sundquist argues: "Thrust into overlapping physical and cultural spaces by their respective histories of racial violence and migration – African Americans in flight from southern segregation, Jews in flight from European and Russian persecution – they met as 'strangers' in the Promised Land of America, principally northern, urban America."[5] As the imagined exchange between James Baldwin and Cynthia Ozick demonstrated,[6] such a commonality based on the status of the oppressed or outsider was not readily accepted and the metaphor showed to be rather problematic basis for partnership. Sundquist himself points at the "intermixture of empathy, anxiety, and hostility" inherent in the notion of the stranger, which may reveal certain parallels between Blacks and Jews but which often overlooks crucial differences:

> By virtue of being or becoming "white," Jews, even recent immigrants, might more quickly be accepted "as one born among" other Americans, but Judaism and Jewishness would still set them apart. By virtue of being usually Christian and often generations-long residents, blacks might lay stronger claim to being "as one born among" other Americans, but their beginnings in slavery and their blackness set them apart.[7]

The notion of the stranger has therefore become for both groups a trope with complex sets of meanings, capturing both the basis of their mutuality and the argument for their fundamental differences. It was especially after World War II when the distinct treatment

[5]Eric J. Sundquist, *Strangers in the Land: Black, Jews, Post-Holocaust America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005) 2.
[6] See chapter 2.3.3.
[7] Sundquist, 3-4.

of the two groups by government programs reinforced rifts between them. While Jews could benefit from many privileges offered to white members of the middle class, African Americans were still being systematically discriminated.

For American Jews, the gradual post-World War integration into the mainstream, or the process of 'whitening', was nevertheless not straightforward. As Karen Brodkin explains, it was marked by ambivalence. Although Jewish ambiguity may have resonated with that of "already white Americans over what they understood to be the modern condition", Jews experienced ambivalence as "specifically ethnoracial", namely in two ways: "They expressed its different sides as a conflict between Jewishness and whiteness, and between white Jewishness and blackness."[8] In other words, Jews remained strangers in America because of their Jewish sensitivity but they ceased to be strangers in the way they were included into the White mainstream economically and socially, in contrast to African Americans.[9] It is then not surprising that in many works by American Jewish authors, the Black character is employed in the process of renegotiating the meaning of the stranger, functioning either as the Other against which the Jewish character defines his Whiteness,[10] or as the stranger with whom the Jewish character can identify to indicate his uniqueness and difference from White mainstream.[11]

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[8] Karen Brodkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004)182.

[9] Such an explanation nevertheless excludes Orthodox Jews, who refused the idea of 'whitening' and assimilation, promoting unambiguously Jewish religious and ethnic specificity. The tension between Orthodox and reform or modern Judaism interested a number Jewish-American authors in the post-World War II years, including Philip Roth who, in his short story "Eli, the Fanatic" (1957), portrays a suburb community of assimilated Jews who are alarmed at the arrival of Orthodox Holocaust survivors; Chaim Potok, whose novel, *The Chosen* (1967), depicts the relationship between boys from Hasidic and Modern Orthodox branches of Judaism; or, even, Malamud's "Jewbird," in which the black bird Schwartz with his unassimilated Jewishness represents a threat to Cohen's assimilated tenancy in America.

[10] As is arguable in many instances the case of Nat Lime and Harry Lesser or of Henderson in Saul Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King* where the tribal king's Blackness is said to make him "fabulously strange" to the protagonist, or of Artur Sammler in Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet* in which the Black's marginalization and victimization indicates Jews' secure position in America.
Saul Bellow, *Henderson the Rain King* (London; New York: Penguin Books, 1976) 207.

[11] Such as in Philip Roth's *Goodbye, Columbus* in which the protagonist Neil Klugman feels drawn to the "small colored boy" and Patimkins' Black maid Carlota for their position of outsiders in the affluent White Jewish world. Philip Roth, *Goodbye, Columbus and Five Short Stories* (London: Penguin Books, 1986) 31.

Malamud himself unintentionally expressed this ambiguous relation among Jewishness, Whiteness and Blackness in his two answers concerning the unpredictability of Black-Jewish relations.[12] In his 1973 reply Malamud includes both Jews and Blacks among American minorities: "A good deal depends on the efficacy of American democracy. If that works as it ought […] the relationship of blacks and Jews and other minorities are bound to improve."[13] In the latter interview, he appears to be speaking not as a member of a minority group, alongside African Americans, but from the position of mainstream society: "All I know is that American blacks have been badly treated. We, as a society, have to redress the balance."[14] Malamud's answers thus demonstrate the complicated process of Whitening and self-identification in post-World War II America and the way that such a process always utilizes the Other, be it the WASP or the African American.

For American Blacks, the notion of the stranger is likewise questioned and renegotiated. As Baldwin's argumentation in his exchange with Ozick revealed, more critical understanding of the idea of strangers in the land started to appear in the discourse of Black-Jewish relations. Returning to Sundquist's statement about Jews being homeless in America due to their religion and Blacks due to their color, this more critical reading of the trope of the stranger reveals the battle over cultural dominance, analogous to the "foundationalist/supersessionist tension between Judaism and Christianity, white Christianity and black Christianity, and thus Judaism and black Christianity,"[15] touched upon in both Ellison-Howe and Baldwin-Ozick literary exchanges and discussed by Emily Miller Budick in her study. As Budick explains in relation to Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time,* African-American attitude toward Jews in America is supersessionist, calling for revision of Western

[12] See chapter 4.2.
[13] Leslie and Joyce Field, "An Interview with Bernard Malamud," *Bernard Malamud: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1975) 13.
[14] Alan Cheuse and Nicholas Delhanco, eds. *Talking Horse: Bernard Malamud on Life and Work* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) 22.
[15] Emily Miller Budick, *Black and Jews in Literary Conversation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 56.

cultural and religious tradition. In this process of "supersessionist intervention," the black must necessarily confront the Jew. "[O]n its way to a new specificity," Budick writes, "the black relationship to the Jews reconstruct the essential disagreement between Christianity and Judaism. In other words, even as they need to disentangle the white church from the black church, so blacks must also wrestle their Christianity free of its Judaic origins."[16] In a way, this is what Malamud seems to suggest in Willie Spearmint's rhetoric in *The Tenants.*

These tensions are developed in the fundamental metaphor of the novel – tenancy. For whom the house of American culture will function as home and who will reside there as one of "homeless selves" who "came not to stay, but to not stay"[17] is one of the main questions Malamud asks in *The Tenants*. At the beginning, it seems to be Lesser who is at home in the house and thus in the mainstream American culture: "Home is where my book is" (*The Tenants,* 6) and Willie, who is repeatedly described as the outsider, the stranger in the tenement. Lesser's later definition of home and stranger nevertheless points at fluidity and temporality of such concepts. Describing home as "where, if you get there, you won't be murdered; if you are it isn't home," (*The Tenants,* 25) Lesser in fact acknowledges that the house is not his home, as his book is destroyed and he is murdered in one of the endings, and he is therefore merely a tenant and not spokesman of American culture. His understanding of the notion of the stranger likewise undergoes certain change in meaning, highlighting, in the manner of Sartre's definition of Jewishness, its dependency on a constitutive outside: "A stranger is a man who is called a stranger." (*The Tenants*, 90) Thus it is Lesser who is identified as the outsider, in the same way as Manischevitz in "Angel Levine", during his walk in Harlem: "Show-off cracker. Ofay spy. Goldberg hisself" (*The Tenants,* 90) and whose Jewishness is the ultimate insult in the game of dozens, excluding him from his assumed

[16] Budick, 44.
[17] Bernard Malamud, *The Tenants* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971) 10, 12.
All subsequent references to the novel are cited in the text in the following manner: (*The Tenants*, page number).

membership in American cultural mainstream, similarly as Ellison's insistence on Howe's Jewish origin did.

Lesser, as well as Howe, is thus identified as the stranger in America so his authority may be undermined and subsequently superseded. As Sundquist writes, "Ellison [Spearmint] maintained the distinction between white and Jew in order to maintain a distinction between black and white,"[18] which Willie further develops into radical declaration of the White/Black difference: "What I feel you feel different. […] Our chemistry is different than yours. Dig that? It *has to* be so." (*The Tenants*, 74) This strategy, in Budick's view, "aimed primarily at challenging the supremacy of white Christian culture in the United States, participating in earlier moves within the history of Christian thought, which had as their basis a supersessionist claim against Judaism."[19] Thus Spearmint's persistence in reminding Lesser of his Jewishness functions as a supersessionist argument: "No Jew can treat me like a man – male or female. You think you are the Chosen People. Well, you are wrong on that. *We* are the Chosen People from as of now on. You gonna find that out soon enough, you gonna lose your fuckn pride." (*The Tenants*, 224) Such an argumentation is evident also on the level of art:

> Also we are the rising people of the future, and if the whites try to hold us down it ain't no secret we might have to cut your throats. You have had your day and now we are gonna have *ours*. That's what I got to write about but I want to write it in black art, in the best way I can. In other words, Lesser, I want to know what you know and *add on to that* what I know *because* I am black. And if that means I have to learn something from whitey to do it better as a black man, then I will *for that purpose only*. (*The Tenants*, 82)

[18] Sundquist, 423.
[19] Budick, 7.

This artistic appropriation and supersessionism explain, in a way, also the end of Willie's story, "Goldberg exits Harlem", in which a group of Blacks refuses to taste human flesh because of its "Jewtaste": "In an alternate ending the synagogue is taken over and turned into a mosque. The blacks dance hasidically." (*The Tenants,* 203) According to Goffman, behind "this grotesque cultural appropriation is the ideal of a displaced yet divinely chosen people, a status for which Blacks and Jews continue to vie. In this extreme scenario, only with the destruction of the Jews can blacks take their proper role as America's true minority, creating the American spiritual center from the margins."[20] In this respect, Willie Spearmint does not simply echo Ellison's perspective that it is the Black who speaks for America and for the inheritance of Western culture but he shifts the view a step further, claiming that the Black speaks for America because he supersedes Western culture.

The reminder of Lesser's Jewishness, and thus of his minority status in America, also reveals Malamud's ironic treatment of the moral imperative implicit in the notion of the stranger.[21] Lesser's approach to other outsiders and strangers is from the beginning of the novel far from "naturally sympathetic," to quote the phrase Cynthia Ozick uses in "Literary Blacks and Jews" to describe Jews' compassion with the suffering outcast.[22] Thus he, for instance, twists Levenspiel's plea for mercy: "Lesser, take a minute to consider reality and so please have mercy," into an ironic compromise when he "out of mercy" does not complain about nonfunctioning elevator: "[s]ince he was screwing Levenspiel by staying on, keeping him from tearing down his building, out of mercy Lesser did not complain. So much for

[20] Ethan Goffman, *Imagining Each Other: Blacks and Jews in Contemporary American Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000) 119.
[21] See Cynthia Ozick's argument in chapter 2.3.3.
[22] As Ozick explains in relation to "Angel Levine": "The sociological – the 'real' – counterpart of Malamud's holy fables is almost always taken for granted by Jews: it is, simply put, that Jews have always known hard times, and are therefore naturally sympathetic to others who are having, or once had, hard times. The 'naturally' is what is important. It is a feeling so normal as to be unrelated to spiritual striving, self-purification, moral accountability, prophecy, Waskowian 'witness,' anything at all theoretical or lofty. This plain observation about particularized suffering requires no special sensitiveness; *naturally* there are Jews everywhere, and some of them are black." Cynthia Ozick, "Literary Blacks and Jews," *Bernard Malamud: A Collection of Critical Essays,* ed. Leslie A. Field and Joyce W. Field (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1975) 82.

mercy." (*The Tenants*, 9) Later he reasserts his lack of compassion when he wishes to get rid of his landlord, whom he describes as "an unfortunate man in form and substance," (*The Tenants*, 9) in the same way he got rid of a wet dog with a bleeding eye (indication of Lesser's own limited view of reality as well as of his self): "Harry grabbed the mutt […] and by offering a bony bit of stale bread every so often, succeeded in enticing him down the stairs and out of the house. It should be so easy with Levenspiel." (*The Tenants*, 24) Similarly in his relationship with Spearmint, Lesser's sympathy is far from natural and his identification with Willie is constrained, even though he admits their shared status: "Writers helped writers. Up to a point: *his* writing came first." (*The Tenants*, 55) Combined with such examples, Lesser's humanistic statement "I treated him like a man" (*The Tenants*, 191) is highly ironic. Intending to reaffirm his belief in moral equality, the proclamation means rather the opposite, as Sheldon Hershinow notes: "The statement contains […] an additional meaning for the reader: 'I treated you as inhumanely as I treat all people.'"[23]

In *The Tenants*, Malamud thus demonstrates how the tension over the meaning of strangers in the land became a part of renegotiating identities, the insider/outsider status, as well as of the moral implications of Jewishness. Considering the anti-essentialist approach to identities and concepts, even one of the traditionally accepted cornerstones of Black-Jewish mutuality, the trope of the stranger, therefore cannot be taken as naturally existent. Thus the very idea of Black-Jewish alliance can consequently be questioned, supporting the revisionist attitude to Black-Jewish relations in America. But also, the competitive discourse over meaning and appropriation in fact validates the existence of the trope, constituting it in the process of questioning its validity.

[23] Sheldon J. Hershinow, *Bernard Malamud* (New York: F. Ungar, 1980) 99.

5.2 "Don't Get the Idea of Ghettoes"

The opening sentences of Malamud's "Black Is My Favorite Color" are a great example of the way Malamud uses certain words to indicate how race and ethnicity are constructed within discourse and how "shared custody"[24] of certain concepts contribute to renegotiation of both personal and collective identities. In this respect, it is significant that Nat Lime opens his narrative mentioning and subsequently reiterating the word 'ghetto': "Charity Sweetness sits in the toilet eating her two hard-boiled eggs while I'm having my ham sandwich and coffee in the kitchen. That's how it goes only don't get the idea of ghettoes. If there's a ghetto I'm the one that's in it."[25]

The narrator's apparent need to explain the strange dining arrangements by incorporating the term 'ghetto' reveals at least two important functions the word has with regard to Malamud's short story and to Black-Jewish relations in America. First, the word obliquely reveals the ethnic and racial identity of both characters. As Paul Witcover explains, the word 'ghetto', which in America "refers to inner-city slum areas populated by poor minorities, usually black and/or Hispanic," originated "centuries ago in Europe, where it referred to special zones within cities to which Jews were restricted by law;" that idea was taken by the Nazis to horrific extremes. That genocidal history was "seized upon in the 1960s, and later by left-wing intellectuals and activists […] as a metaphor for what was taking place in American ghettoes, with their crime rates, poor medical care, and other killing burdens of institutional neglect and racism."[26] Though highly simplified, the history of the term's meanings as outlined by Witcover uncovers the applicability of the word in both Jewish and

[24] Paul Witcover, "Critical Essay on 'Black Is My Favorite Color'," *Short Stories for Students*, ed. David M. Galens, vol. 16 (Detroit: Gale, 2002) Literature Resource Center<http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CH1420043711&v=2.1&u=karlova&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w&asid=58590047075d9857f5b7406c7b869542> 19 May 2015.
[25] Bernard Malamud, "Black Is My Favorite Color," *Idiots First* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969) 21. All subsequent references to the short story will be cited in the text in the following manner: (Favorite Color, page number).
[26] Witcover

African-American contexts, suggesting, thus, racial identity of Nat's cleaning lady, as well as his own Jewishness, which is confirmed also in his indirectly emphasized transgression against Orthodox Judaism (ham sandwich).

Second, it indicates how reiteration of certain terms confirms and thus reinvents the discourse of racism. Obviously aware of the negative connotation the word has in the context of urban America, Nat uses it to prove his liberal stance, achieving ironically the opposite effect. The word 'ghetto' here serves, not only as a first indicator of existent norm of racially divided society, a norm that enables Nat to benefit from his superior position within the system, but simultaneously as a citation and thus construction of the very same norm. Already in the second and third sentences Malamud illustrates how rhetoric and choice of words may contribute to the production of discourse of racism and relations based on racial hierarchy.

Nat Lime's role in the discourse is further confirmed in the first paragraph. Although he calls Charity Sweetness his "cleaning lady", without any reference to race,[27] he describes her in terms of bodily characteristics, which again brings the imperative of racially biased relations to light: "She's a small person with a flat body, frizzy hair, and a quiet face that the light shines out of," asserting again her implied inferiority by stressing the fact that he is not only in position to perform benevolent gestures but also to evaluate their validity: "The first time Charity Sweetness came in to clean, a little more than a year and a half, I *made the mistake* to ask her to sit down at the kitchen table with me and eat her lunch." (Favorite Color, 21; emphasis added) That this discourse of hierarchy is based on race rather than on class

[27] Philip Roth in *Portnoy's Complaint* depicts a scene analogous to that of the opening image of Malamud's "Black Is My Favorite Color." As David Lukeš discusses in his inspirational thesis, Alexander Portnoy criticizes harshly his mother for making their African-American cleaning lady eat separately and for calling her *shvartze*. Although Portnoy calls her "the cleaning lady" at home in an outburst against his mother's segregating practice, his speech outside domestic environment betrays similarly xenophobic kind of behavior and language, especially in connection to his involvement with a girl he nicknames "The Monkey", to whom he refers as his *shvartze.*
David Lukeš, *Textual Identity in Selected Novels by Philip Roth: Representation, Dissimulation, Creation* (BA thesis, Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy v Praze, 2011) 33-34.

or gender differences between the two characters is affirmed in the last sentence of the paragraph: "It's my fate with colored people." (Favorite Color, 21)

Malamud's use of the term 'ghetto' and the implicit tension over its appropriation suggested by Witcover is confirmed by Eric J. Sundquist: "Debate over the appropriation of cultural domains was perhaps nowhere more visible in the postwar decades than in the effective transference of the concept of the ghetto from Jews to African Americans,"[28] which is further dramatized in *The Tenants*. In the novel, Malamud merges the two experiences of the ghetto, African-American and Jewish, into one, contained in the image of tenement, making thus his ghetto, as Sundquist writers, "a palimpsest of historical convergence."[29] Thus both Lesser and Spearmint live in the tenement as in "undefined exile," in space layered with the history of Jewish and African-American ghettoes from which they seem unable to escape (though they both in a way stay willingly). For Lesser, the house, which he grows to fear, "Lesser is afraid of the house, really afraid. Familiar things are touched with strangeness," (*The Tenants*, 224) becomes a reminder of "the Jews' ultimate tragedy of ghettoization"[30] – pogroms and the Holocaust. Therefore, Malamud depicts graffiti in one of the abandoned flats as figuring "a crayon cartoon of A. Hitler wearing two sets of sexual organs, malefemale" (*The Tenants*, 11) and the history of Jewish pogroms is recalled in Willie's stories. Furthermore, in one of his baffled visions by the end of *The Tenants*, Lesser imagines a fire consuming the house and its neighborhood similar to the one in the first ending of the novel,

[28] Sundquist, 391.
[29] Sundquist, 396.
Such an accumulation of meanings on the notion of the ghetto is prefigured already, for example, in Saul Bellow's short story "Looking for Mr. Green" (1951), where the African-American ghetto in Chicago is described as being in "a second layer of ruins," once rebuilt after the Great Fire but dilapidated again in 1930s, and further linked with the fall of Rome, of Western civilization. According to Ethan Goffman, even the Jewish implication of the term is present, although the protagonist, George Grebe, is not identified as Jewish in the story: "In Bellow literal memories of Jewish occupation of similar ghettos – indeed, often of the same ghettos at a different time period – are absent, yet ghosts of such memories persist in a sympathy with the Black residents as part of a common humanity." Goffman, 54.
Saul Bellow, "Looking for Mr. Green," *Mosby's Memoirs and Other Stories* (New York: Viking Press, 1968) 104.
[30] Sundquist, 395-396.

trying to figure out what is going on: "Masses of burning houses in a forest of fires. From close by, like the sound of waves breaking, rise a muted roaring, screaming, sobbing. Who cries there? Who dies there? Riot? *Pogrom*? Civil War?" (*The Tenants*, 225-226; emphasis added)

For Willie, the place likewise represents a ghetto, or an urban slum, one of many that have emerged in cities after World War II when African Americans were still segregated in terms of housing policies. The Federal Housing Administration promoted racial segregation even in the postwar era, in spite of outlawing restrictive covenants in 1948. As Brodkin explains, the Federal Housing Administration "continued to encourage builders to write them in against African Americans,"[31] as a result of which African Americans were not allowed to take out a mortgage and afford houses in the suburbs. In many cases, African Americans migrating to Northern cities from the South literally replaced Jews in urban areas, as Jews made use of federal programs and moved to the suburbs.[32] Instead of a shared experience such a replacement pointed at radically diverse conditions of American Blacks and Jews. "Unlike the ghettos inhabited by American Jews and other white ethnic immigrants," Sundquist writes, "mid-century black ghettoes appeared not to be springboards to prosperity in which the sacrifice of one generation would be rewarded in the next, but domains of despair in which a culture of poverty had become so deeply ingrained that it might never be escaped."[33] Willie's anti-Semitic insults aimed at Levenspiel are a reflection of this trend. For him, Levenspiel is a "[f]artn Jew slumlord" based on his economic status, as Willie subsequently clarifies: "All I'm saying is an economic fact" (*The Tenants*, 41) and the figure

[31] Brodkin, 47.
[32] Philip Roth aptly depicts this trend in *Goodbye, Columbus* by describing the location of the Patimkins' store: "Patimkin Kitchen and Bathroom Sinks was in the heart of the Negro section of Newark. Years ago, at the time of the great immigration, it had been the Jewish section, and still one could see the little fish stores, the kosher delicatessens, the Turkish baths, where my grandparents had shopped and bathed at the beginning of the century. […] The neighborhood had changed: the old Jews like my grandparents had struggled and died, and their offspring had struggled and prospered, and moved further and further west." Philip Roth, *Goodbye, Columbus and Five Short Stories* (London: Penguin Books, 1986) 72.
[33] Sundquist, 395.

of 'Goldberg', the archetypal figure of the exploitative landlord and calculating Jew, appears in one of his manuscripts. If for Lesser the tenement and the image of the ghetto evoke the Jewish past of persecution heightening thus also his sense of Jewishness, then for Willie the house epitomizes the economic, social and psychological reality of American urban "colonized"[34] ghettos.

Willie's attitude to the ghettoized tenement replays to a certain degree the strategy of Black nationalists who initially accepted the pathological view of urban ghettoes, supported by various urban field studies, such as Kenneth B. Clark's influential *Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of Social Power* (1965), in which he, among other issues, discusses, the psychological consequences of the White superiority–Black inferiority model, resulting in the African-American psychological self-enslavement.[35] Adaptation of the pathological view enabled African-American activists to turn it into a political weapon, as Sundquist explains: "For a time […] Clark's argument proved compelling to the new generation of Black activists who adapted damage theory to more overt political purposes." Discussing Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton's landmark volume *Black Power* (1967) in which the authors employed Clark's arguments, Sundquist explains how the ghetto gradually became "an arena of liberation," characterized by self-affirmation, race pride and "a readiness to employ violence as a political tool."[36] Significantly, Black Power advocates utilized juxtaposition with Jews' experience of ghettoization in Europe in their ideological departure from the view that African Americans were incorrigibly scarred by the life in urban ghettoes. Drawing a comparison between uprisings in Warsaw ghettoes and 1960s urban riots, for example,

[34] Sundquist, 396.
In his study, Sundquist discusses how anti-Semitic stereotypes, such as that of the exploitative landlord and merchant preying upon Blacks, were revived in anticolonial rhetoric of some of the Black Power activists and writers, leading to "a comradely identification with Palestinians and Arabs" in the years of Arab-Israeli conflicts, particularly the Six-Day War. "In some cases," Sundquist writes, "they further recast the Jewish example by declaring, in a domestic application of anticolonial theory, that blacks had to be liberated from the 'concentration camp' of the urban 'ghetto,' where they were still exploited by 'Goldberg,' the Jewish landlord or merchant." Sundquist, 8.
[35] Sundquist, 398-399.
[36] Sundquist, 399.

Black activists legitimatized their actions and proclaimed the upheavals eligible means of fighting against injustice.[37]

In *The Tenants*, such a turn from the damage theory to Black nationalist rhetoric is exemplified, Sundquist observes, in Spearmint's self-affirmation and liberation from Lesser's cultural patronage: "Grounded in the moral right to rebel against oppression, the nationalist strategy expressed by Willie Spearmint would permit blacks to remake themselves as a nation by reclaiming history, by renegotiating linguistic usage, and by liberating themselves from white cultural terrorism."[38] Part of the tension between Harry and Willie, between patron and rebel, between White/Jewish and Black thus derives from the tension over terms and concepts, 'ghetto' being one of them. In the contest over its appropriation and signification, battle over another concept is embedded – the Holocaust. Apart from the graffiti in the deserted flat, Malamud clearly has the Holocaust in mind when writing Willie's story "The First Pogrom in the U.S. of A.": "There is none that Hitler shit of smashing store windows, forcing Zionists to scrub sidewalks, or rubbing their faces in dog crap." (*The Tenants*, 219) The smell of human flesh the narrator describes when Willie burns Harry's manuscript possibly also alludes to the genocide of Jews during World Word II. As Sundquist writes about *The Tenants*, "the superimposed ghettos of the novel also contain superimposed Holocausts."[39]

In the history of Black-Jewish relations in America, the idea of Holocaust has been a significant one. For many African Americans, the Holocaust has become "a conceptual framework for reinterpreting both the ordeal of slavery and its legacy in racial discrimination

[37] Although frequently critical of the Black Power movement, James Baldwin utilizes in "Negroes Are Anti-Semitic Because They're Anti-White" the juxtaposition between Jewish history of persecution in Europe and black experience of exploitation, popular in the 1960s and 70s: "The Jew is a white man, and when white men rise up against oppression, they are heroes: when black men rise, they have reverted to their native savagery. The uprising in the Warsaw ghetto was not described as a riot, nor were the participants maligned as hoodlums: the boys and girls in Watts and Harlem are thoroughly aware of this, and it certainly contributes to their attitude toward the Jews." James Baldwin, "Negroes Are Anti-Semitic Because They're Anti-White," *Collected Essays* (New York: Library of America, 1998) 742.
[38] Sundquist, 399.
[39] Sundquist, 432.

and violence" and "the benchmark of genocide" against which slavery and its aftermaths have been judged.[40] The fact that the history of slavery and continued exploitation of African Americans did not raise as strong reactions as the European Holocaust, even though the number of casualties was much higher, stirred up numerous debates about which group's experience constitutes the 'true' Holocaust, problematizing thus further Black-Jewish mutuality. In Sundquist's words: "Contemplation of the Holocaust might make possible deeper empathy between Jews and blacks, but it proved, over time, just as likely to confuse their alliance and drag them into arguments over comparative victimization."[41]

Consequently, many works by African-American authors or with African-American protagonists invoke or overwrite the genocide of Jews in Europe.[42] In *The Tenants*, Willie Spearmint's competitive exchanges with the Jewish protagonist likewise bring to the fore the history of slavery and the pervasive system of exploitation: "I'm writin the soul writin of black people cryin out we are still slaves in this fuckn country and we ain't gonna stay slaves any longer. How can you understand it, Lesser, if your brain is white?" (*The Tenants*, 74-75) Analogously, many works by Jewish-American authors attest to a new sense of ethnic

[40] Sundquist, 5-6.
In his study, Sundquist discusses the influence of a number of important accounts promoting the comparison between slavery and the Holocaust, Stanley Elkins's *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (1959) being one of the most influential and controversial ones. According to Sundquist, Elkin's notorious analogy between plantations and Nazi concentration camps, both being "instances of total institutions whose disciplinary regimes were so severe as to annihilate personality", was a culmination of, rather than an aberration from social theory of that time. Elkins's study thus significantly contributed to the discourse of comparative suffering and of constructing ethnic/racial Self through engaging the trauma of the other group. Sundquist, 223-224, 398.
[41] Sundquist, 37-38.
[42] For instance, Tony Morrison's dedication in *Beloved* (1987) to "Sixty million and more" employs the "six million" of the Holocaust in order to draw a comparison between the much discussed atrocities of the European genocide and the horrifying number of casualties of the slave trade and of the continuing exploitation of African Americans. Certain passages in Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* as well as his later essays also attest to growing tone of disillusionment and bitterness caused by the apathy of the American majority towards the exploitation of Blacks in comparison with astounded reaction to the Holocaust. In Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*, the African-American protagonist passing for Jew has the arm tattooed to erase his past and to fix permanently his U.S. Navy instead of his Black identity, analogously to the way identity and history of Jews in concentration camps were replaced by tattooed numbers: "The ineradicable biography was there, as was the prototype of the ineradicable, a tattoo being the very emblem of what cannot be removed." Philip Roth, *The Human Stain* (London: Vintage, 2001) 184.

awareness brought about by potential threats of anti-Semitism resulting from the revelation of the atrocities in concentration camps.[43]

Malamud himself may be cited as an example of this renewed ethnic sensibility. In 1977 during Jewish Heritage Award presentation address, he acknowledged the influence of the Holocaust on his imagination:

> In my time, I've lived in that experience when it became particularly perilous, in and during the years of World War II, when a million refugees wandered on thousands of constructed hard dark roads, and sailed on closed seas to closed ports; and when multitudes of Jews were imprisoned and destroyed, without mercy by men or heavenly intervention, in the concentration camps. I did not live the experience in day-to-day terror as some of you here did, but in imagination was affected by it.[44]

For many American Jews, including Malamud, the concept of the ghetto and the accompanying tension over the meaning of the Holocaust have thus become a reminder of Jewishness, as well as a framework for approaching the issue of Civil Rights and Black-Jewish relations. In this respect it is telling that that Malamud intended to write a novel about Black experience in America before *The Tenants* but eventually decided to write one about Jewish ghettoes and an imprisonment of a Jewish handyman in Tsarist Russia, entitled *The Fixer* (1966). As he himself explains, "an idea concerned with injustice in America today has become one set in Russia fifty years ago, dealing with anti-Semitism there. Injustice is injustice." The parallel between African American's plight in the US and Jews' experience of anti-Semitism in Europe is further asserted by Malamud's explanation of his historical sources, shaping the novel's whole "to suggest quality of the afflictions of the Jews under

[43] Including Potok's *The Chosen*, in which the horrifying news of concentration camps bring many secular American Jews back to synagogues or Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet,* in which Sammler's cultural philosophy promoting European civilization at the expense of Jewish particularism is complicated by his Holocaust experience, obstructing thus his universalist position and foregrounding his Jewishness.
[44] *Talking Horse*, 183.

Hitler."[45] The analogy between *The Fixer* and *The Tenants*,[46] as well as the comparison between slavery and the Holocaust, and between different meanings of the concept of the ghetto have therefore created a context for American Blacks and Jews, and for American audience in general, struggling to grasp significations and implications of these concepts, along with the term's role in understanding the Self and the Other.

5.3 Names and Naming

When Calvin Cohn, the protagonist of Malamud's last finished novel *God's Grace* (1982), survives as the only human of a thermonuclear war and subsequently tries to establish a perfected civilization on an island among primates, he puts a great emphasis on language and on naming. Language for him represents a tool for advancement, as is apparent from his assumed role of a bearer and a teacher of civilization, passing on knowledge and his view of morality during lessons under a "schooltree".[47] It nevertheless soon becomes apparent that Cohn uses language not only as an opportunity for education and progress but for control as well. One of the first acts he performs after finding out that a chimpanzee named Gottlob has survived the flood is giving him a new name: "Cohn was not fond of the name Dr. Bünder

[45] *Talking Horse*, 88-89.

[46] There is a significant link between the two novels, noted by Iska Alter in "*The Fixer, The Tenants*, and the Historical Perspective," based on the motif of smell. In a conversation between the Jewish prisoner and his main supporter in *The Fixer*, Malamud lets the latter pronounce: "There's something cursed, it seems to me, about a country where men have owned men as property. The stink of that corruption never escapes the soul, and it is the stink of future evil." The narrator in *The Tenants* repeatedly highlights smell, very early on, in the second sentence of the novel: "He smelled the living earth in the dead of winter," (*The Tenants*, 3) or later when Willie's manuscript is said to give "fort a gassy odor" (*The Tenants*, 59) or when Mary, the black woman with whom Harry sleeps with before the game of dozens, tells Lesser that he smells: "Like you white is all I mean. […] No smell at all." (*The Tenants*, 47) In *The Tenants*, Malamud thus develops a motif introduced in his earlier novel about persecution of Jews in Europe to comment on American history of slavery, supporting thus indirectly the existence of the tension over the ownership and appropriation of the concept of genocide between Jews and African Americans.
Bernard Malamud, *The Fixer* (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1969) 172.
Iska Alter, "*The Fixer, The Tenants*, and the Historical Perspective," *The Good Man Dilemma: Social Criticism in the Fiction of Bernard Malamud* (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1981) Literature Resource Center
<http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CH1420047440&v=2.1&u=karlova&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w&asid=2589eca73927af909a5856bd6adddcb8> 19 May 2015.

[47] Bernard Malamud, *God's Grace* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1982) 89.

had hung on the unsuspecting chimp; it did not seem true to type, flapped loose in the breeze. […] He then informed the little chimp that he now had a more fitting name, one that went harmoniously with the self presented. In other words he was Buz." It is clear from the description of Cohn's reasoning that it is not only name that is ascribed to the named but also certain assumptions of his identity. The chimpanzee therefore protests against his new name: "He reacted in anger, beat his chest, jumped up and down in breathy protest,"[48] which Cohn ignores and explains in terms of his temperament. Cohn continues to carry out the role of Adam[49] and he names other monkeys and the island itself, despite doubts about his right to do so: "[He] at last settled for Cohn's Island. […] Cohn had second thoughts and felt he ought to remove the sign next time around, lest the Lord accuse him of hubris."[50] When Buz himself begins naming other monkeys on the island, Cohn gets cross because his status is threatened and his authority reduced. When after series of conflicts Cohn clips the wires that permit Buz to speak, the chimpanzee in his last words refuses the name given to him by Cohn and claims his old name back: "I om not Buz, my name ist Gottlob,"[51] symbolically rejecting moral system and knowledge taught by Cohn.

In *God's Grace*, Malamud renders the crucial connection between naming and power, which has been critical in African-American tradition. As Sigrid King writes in her article on the mentioned connection with regard to Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, African Americans were aware from their earliest experiences as slaves in America that "those who name also control, and those who are named are subjugated."[52] Just as the protagonist of Malamud's *God's Grace* controls the use of language and takes possession

[48] Malamud, *God's Grace*21-22.
[49] "And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him." Genesis 2:19-20
[50] Malamud, *God's Grace* 45.
[51] Malamud, *God's Grace* 215.
[52] Sigrid King, "Naming and Power in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," *Black American Literature Forum* 24.4 (Winter, 1990) 683, JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3041796> 12 April 2016.

of the chimp's name and thus simultaneously claims authority over his self, African Americans in America faced a very similar experience, as King's quote from Kimberly Benston's "'I Yam What I Am': Naming and Unnaming in Afro-American Literature"[53] illustrates:

> Language – that fundamental act of organizing the mind's encounter with an experienced world – is propelled by a rhythm of naming. It is the means by which the mind takes possession of the named, at once fixing the named as irreversibly Other and representing it in crystallized isolation from all conditions of externality.[54]

Benston's statement explains how the practice of naming of slaves by their masters fixed them as the "Other", implying, in King's words, "an interpretation of the named as an object, rather than a subject – something which cannot be part of the namer's self."[55]

Judith Butler also contemplates the power inherent in naming. In *Bodies That Matter* she explains that naming is "at once setting of a boundary, and also the repeated inculcation of a norm."[56] The name is thus not simply "fixed in time, but becomes fixed again and again through time, indeed, becomes fixed through its reiteration."[57] The act of naming and the name's reiteration thus contribute to constructing and maintaining the normative system that has created the name, as well identity of its bearer. Given the subversive possibility implicit in the concept of performativity,[58] the name, similarly as identities and concepts, is open

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[53] The title of Benston's article employs Ellison's pun in *Invisible Man*, already mentioned in chapter 4.3.
[54] Qtd. in King, 684.
[55] King, 684.
Apart from exercising power over the named, objectification of the Other enabled the namer to treat the Other as a commodity. The act of naming thus also points at the aspect of profit, the aspect which Saul Bellow ironically treats in *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, when two characters plan to make profit out of naming trees and bushes people have in gardens: "However, if they desire to know, it makes them depressed if they can't name the bushes on their own property. They feel like phonies. The bushes belong. They themselves don't. And I'm convinced that knowing the names of things braces people up. […] If people want things named or renamed, you can make dough by becoming a taxonomist." Saul Bellow, *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1971) 103.
[56] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York; London: Routledge, 1993) 8.
[57] Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 212.
[58] See chapter 2.1.3.

to resignification, which Sigrid King calls, with reference to Benston's article, unnaming: "In order to break away from this sense of powerlessness, Afro-Americans have historically 'unnamed' or renamed themselves. As Benston points out, renaming can be a means of self-creation and reformation of a fragmented past."[59] So Buz in *God's Grace* unnames and thus dehumanizes himself, reforming his more 'natural' self, Irene in *The Tenants* changes her name from American sounding Bell to her original Jewish name Belinsky, letting her bleached hair grow out, forming a yarmulke-like "black cap on her blond head," restoring thus together with her surname and appearance also "perhaps something inside her," (*The Tenants,* 154) and so Willie Spearmint insists on being called Bill, a name he chooses himself.

Harry Lesser's lessons on the 'correct' use of English language and the 'correct' form of art are in many ways analogous to Cohen's teaching under the schooltree. Like Cohen and the monkeys, and similarly to Crusoe and Friday, Lesser passes on together with knowledge also a certain set of power relations, fortifying his own cultural superiority. Thus when Willie changes his name to Bill Spear, he symbolically attempts to break free from the system that puts him into inferior position. As Goffman aptly points out, the name of the Jewish protagonist and the Black writer's nickname highlight the way language conveys and constructs social hierarchy in the novel: "The common referent of the last name for the Jewish character ('Lesser') and the nickname for the Black ('Willie') further emphasized social status as engraved in language: an implied 'Mr.' versus a 'boy.'"[60] Malamud used the same boy/man dynamics already in "Black Is My Favorite Color" where it, like in the later novel, results in violent conflict. While Nat is walking Ornita home one evening in Harlem, they are stopped "by three *men* – maybe they were *boys,*" which is also the first word Nat uses when reacting to their insults: "'*Boys*,' I said, 'we're all brothers. […] Please let us pass.'" (Favorite Color, 30-31; emphasis added) Implying his superior and their inferior position in this

[59] King, 684.
[60] Goffman, 113-114.

exchange, subsequently naively pleading common brotherhood, he is unsurprisingly despised and even beaten. In *The Tenants*, the Black writer reacts to the uneven power relation implied in his and Lesser's names by changing his name, a change that Lesser has difficulty coming to terms with.

Lesser repeatedly calls Bill by his previous name, sometimes correcting himself: "Bravo, Willie – I mean Bill" (*The Tenants*, 81) but often failing to notice his mistake. It is telling that one of such unremarked instances happens when discussing Bill's anti-Semitic language towards Levenspiel:

> "Jew slumlord bastard."
>
> "Shit with the Jew stuff, Willie."
>
> "Bill is the name of my name, Lester," the black said, his eyeballs reddening.
>
> "O.K., Bill, but cut out the Jew stuff." (*The Tenants*, 93-94)

For Lesser, Bill's language as well as his chosen name disrupts his secured place in the system of power relations, resulting in his ignoring Bill's new name. Considering the necessity of social agreement in constructing identities,[61] refusing to acknowledge the Black writer's chosen name and thus his preferred identity implies silencing of his individuality and imposing meaning from the outside.

The act of renaming in Spearmint's case furthermore concurs with King's analysis of Benston's article in the way Bill employs renaming as a tool for self-recreation and for reshaping his past. His name is thus not the only thing he changes but it is also his personal history that he repeatedly alters, as Lesser learns from Irene: "He changes his birthplace every time he talks about it." (*The Tenants*, 116) Unwillingness to be defined by his past[62] parallels

[61] See chapter 2.1.2.

[62] Willie's resistance to remember his past parallels to Coleman Silk's attempt to break free of his family in Roth's *The Human Stain*, calling the emphasis to one's personal history 'ancestral worship' and likening it to identity imprisonment: "Ancestor worship – that's how Coleman put it. Honoring the past was one thing – the idolatry that is ancestor worship was something else. The hell with that imprisonment." Philip Roth, *The Human Stain*, 144.

with his second manuscript, in which a Black boy denies giving a policeman his name and home address, thus distancing himself from his drunk mother and the way of life she represents. What sort of "reformation of a fragmented past", to use King's words, or self-creation the boy in Bill's book struggles for is not clear but the writer's chosen name provides certain suggestions.

If the change from Willie to Bill may be interpreted as an adjustment of status from boy to man, then the change from Spearmint to Spear possibly indicates Bill's embracing of the Black nationalism rhetoric. Referring to a tribal weapon by his family name, Bill's renaming echoes the idea of recovering homeland, actual or spiritual, in Africa, part of which is also, Goffman remarks, "the necessity of an independent aesthetic," since "Europe can no longer be considered the center of culture and thought. An Afrocentric genealogy must be uncovered (or constructed) as a stable center for Black identity."[63] Hence Bill's denial of Lesser's aesthetic standards and hence possibly the novel's African imagery, which includes, for example, the description of graffiti depicting a "[d]eadly jungle" with "huge mysterious trees", "dwarf palms with saw-toothed rotting leaves" and "eye-blinding orchidaceous flowers […] eating alive a bewildered goat as a gorilla with hand held-penis erectus,"[64] (*The Tenants*, 11-12), a scene in which Bill and his friends are ironically described as missionaries discussing the meaning of the "civilized" during the destruction of Harry's manuscript, or the imagined African double wedding.

Bill's new name does not unequivocally indicate Blacks' heritage in Africa but it also points to American identity. As Budick explains, "Spearmint produces the self-affirmation that is inseparably part of one dominant American literary tradition." Spear, Budick adds, "evokes Walt Whitman's spears of grass and their own Emersonian claims,"[65] supporting thus, together with the name "Blind Willie Shakespeare" with which the Black writer signs

[63] Goffman, 94.
[64] An image partly reminiscent of Bellow's pickpocket in *Mr. Sammler's Planet.*
[65] Budick, 54.

his stories about pogroms in America, the argument that Bill attempts to claim Western and thus also American cultural tradition for himself.[66]

The realization of a name's inadequacy and of power structure inherent in the act of naming, unnaming and renaming is thus not limited only to Black experience and history but it plays a significant role in Western culture as well. As King writes with reference to Benston, "unnaming has a particular significance for the questing hero or heroine in much of Western literature. Many questing literary characters come to the realization that names are fictions, that no particular name can satisfy the energy of the questing self."[67] Bernard Malamud in *The Tenants* combines both the African-American and the Western cultural traditions, providing thus an analogy to the religious and social tension between Judaism and Christianity and between Blacks and Jews in America. Such a tension frequently takes form of a discursive contest over terms and concepts, endorsing thus the argument that language and literature play a crucial role in renegotiating mutual relations, as well as in constructing individual and collective identities in the contact with the Other.

[66] See chapter 4.3.
[67] King, 684.
George Grebe in Bellow's "Looking for Mr. Green" comes to similar realization during his quest to find the title character: "It almost doesn't do any good to have a name if you can't be found by it. It doesn't stand for anything. He might as well not have any." Bellow, "Looking for Mr. Green," 106-107.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

"It is painful when images meant to marry repel each other,"[1] Bernard Malamud writes about Harry Lesser's book, *The Tenants*, expressing thus also the ambiguity inherent in many Black-Jewish encounters and literary exchanges. One of the reasons for this fundamental ambivalence is, as the thesis illustrated, the constructed nature of identities and concepts. Constantly in the process of renegotiation and appropriations of meanings, traditionally accepted common links between American Blacks and Jews, such as the status of outsiders or history of persecution and suffering, thus attest rather to discursive tensions over self-identification, assimilation and ethnic particularism and over cultural dominance than to shared experience.

The thesis has placed Bernard Malamud and his selected fiction dealing with Black-Jewish relations within the discourse of these tensions and contested identities. It has demonstrated that the Self necessarily employs the Other in the process of self-affirmation and construction. Such a process requires a complex mixture of identification and repudiation, suggesting, thus, simultaneously, its limits. The discursive contact or dialogue with the Other requires certain reduction of identities of both participants; both have to temporarily fix their Selves, as well as their historical and socio-political contexts, in order to make the exchange possible. As Butler writers in *Bodies That Matter* in connection with subject-positions within political discourse, the "insistence on [temporarily] coherent identity as a point of departure presumes that what a 'subject' is is already known, already fixed, and that that ready-made subject might enter the world to renegotiate its place," which implies the Self's and the Other's momentary "coherence at the cost of its own complexity."[2]

[1] Bernard Malamud, *The Tenants* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971) 184.
[2] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York; London: Routledge, 1993) 115.

It is especially the Black Other, whose identity is reduced in the works of Jewish-American writers or works with Jewish protagonists. The Black Other is approached and constructed predominantly from the perspective of the perceiving Jewish consciousness, and through available fragments, never fully and completely, which reflects the limits in real-life of communication between Jewish and African Americans. As Ethan Goffman writes: "Jewish liberalism can penetrate the veil hiding Black society from dominant culture only intermittently."[3] The thesis therefore challenged the reading of "Angel Levine," "Black Is My Favorite Color" and *The Tenants* as reflecting the progression of the so-called 'Black-Jewish alliance' from friendly cooperation to hostile disintegration. Instead of accepting such an interpretation, the study questioned it by highlighting the above suggested limits of the narrating consciousness and by discussing Malamud's use of irony.

Malamud employs irony frequently in the form of ironic reversals, such as the reversal of Selves in *The Tenants*, of commonly accepted roles of Jewish provider and Black recipient in "Angel Levine," or of the paradigm of Jews as victims in "Black Is My Favorite Color." Consequently, one may justifiably call into question the function and implications of these reversals within and outside the space of literary representations. They, on the one hand, subvert conventional views of Black and Jewish status, opening the way for resignification and possibility of self-identification. On the other hand, they accept these conventional roles prior to their reversing, confirming and re-establishing thus the system they seek to dissolve.

The same can be argued to be the case of the present study. Challenging and rethinking Black-Jewish relations in Malamud's works presume accepting a certain set of assumptions. For instance, the argument for performative construction of categories such as race and ethnicity required the opposition to take the essentialist approach to identities, the existence of which was thus reaffirmed in the very act of its denial. The thesis itself has thus

[3] Ethan Goffman, *Imagining Each Other: Blacks and Jews in Contemporary American Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000) 69.

illustrated that identities and their theorizing cannot stand apart from discourse which constitutes and reaffirms them at the same time.

As a consequence, Bernard Malamud's "Angel Levine," "Black Is My Favorite Color" and *The Tenants* can be viewed not merely as reflections of or comments on racial and ethnic tensions in America but as constitutive elements of the very same tensions. The selected texts, as well as other texts they refer or react to[4] and which they further generate,[5] contribute to the discourse through and against that which American Jews and Blacks reconstruct and renegotiate their identities and their status in America.

Perhaps nowhere can the enduring role of Malamud's texts in the discourse of Black-Jewish relations be better seen than at the example of Cynthia Ozick's analysis of Malamud's selected works entitled "Literary Blacks and Jews." Published a year after *The Tenants*, Ozick's essay considers Malamud's "Angel Levine" and the 1971 novel in the light of socio-historical realities, as well as a number of intertextual disputes, though not all of them are directly mentioned in the text.[6] Since its publication, this analysis has become one of the key texts on Black-Jewish relations, both inside and outside the context of literature, as, for instance, its republication in Paul Berman's *Blacks and Jews: Alliances and Arguments* indicates. Published in 1994 as a part of the renewed interest in the issues of Black-Jewish mutuality in America, fueled by the 1991 riots in Crown Heights and the intensifying anti-Semitism of the Nation of Islam, Berman's collection of essays provides a spectrum of views on the topic. Significantly, Ozick wrote an afterword to her 1972 essay, reaffirming its relevance more than two decades after its first publication: "What for Malamud was a fiction

[4] See, for instance, the discussion of various literary references in *The Tenants* in chapter 4.3 or the discourse of intertextual dialogues in chapter 2.3.1.

[5] Consider the extensive body of critical works on Malamud and Black-Jewish relations in America, including the present thesis.

[6] In her study, Emily Miller Budick suggests that Malamud was possibly aware not only of Howe-Ellison dispute but also of an earlier exchange between Ellison and Stanley Edgar Hyman.
Emily Miller Budick, *Black and Jews in Literary Conversation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 19-32.

of blows – blows not yet realized in actual human flesh at the time his novel appeared, and therefore still confined to the safety of metaphor – has become, in the last decade of the twentieth century, a reality of the New York streets."[7] Ozick's afterword has, like her original text, generated numerous reactions, such as Andrew Furman's alternative to her reading in "Revisiting Literary Blacks and Jews."[8]

Leaving Ozick's and Furman's arguments aside, the persisting influence of Ozick's analysis demonstrates that Malamud's works continue to shape the discourse of Black-Jewish relations in America. Decades after their publication, they keep entering intertextual dialogues, contributing thus also to the construction of ethnic identities within American context.

[7] Qtd. in Andrew Furman, "Revisiting Literary Blacks and Jews," *Midwest Quarterly* 44.2 (Winter, 2003) 134, Midwest Quarterly Online <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&an=8947979&scope=site> 29 Feb 2016.

[8] As Furman writes: "My own view regarding relation between African- and Jewish-Americans […] is considerably more sanguine than Ozick's. That said, I hardly wish to substitute a halcyon hopefulness for what I take to be Ozick's hyperbolic cynicism. […] I wish to suggest […] that relations between African- and Jewish-Americans continue to be a good bit more vital, dynamic, and above all, a good bit more important to both minority groups, than Ozick implies, not least of all through avoiding mention in her recent Afterword of any contemporary 'literary' Blacks and Jews." Furman, 135.

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